

The Perceptions of Teachers on the Implementation of the School Progression Policy in Primary Schools

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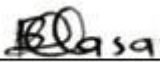
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

Student number 2014180380

I, Boithatelo Hlasa, declare that this dissertation hereby submitted for the MEd degree at the University of the Free State is my own, independent work and has not previously been submitted by me at another university/institution/faculty.

Signed: Boithatelo Hlasa

Date: December 2022



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ABBREVIATIONS

CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
DAR	Drop All and Read
DBE	Department of Basic Education
HSRC	Human Science Research Council
ICT	Information Communication Technologies
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPA	National Protocol for Assessment
NPPPR	National Protocol Pertaining to Promotion and Progression Requirements
NSC	National Senior Certificate
SASA	South African Schools Act
SBST	School-based Support Team
SIAS	Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support
SMT	School Management Team

ABSTRACT

In reaction to high repetition rates in South African primary schools, the Department of Education introduced the progression policy through the National Policy Pertaining to the Progression and Promotion (NPPPR) of learners and the National Protocol for Assessment (NPA), to serve as guidelines on how to promote and progress learners through the education system. The intention of this study was to explore the perceptions of teachers about the implementation of the progression policy. It is believed that teachers' perceptions influence how they maximise their production, especially when confronted by unprepared learners who are not grade ready.

This qualitative study provides an interpretation and analysis of teachers' perceptions and experiences by responding to the question, What are the perceptions of teachers about the implementation of the progression policy in primary schools? Situated in an interpretive paradigm with a phenomenological design, the study explored teachers' perceptions. The study was embedded in a social justice theoretical framework that advocates for fair treatment and participation and promotion of teachers' human rights through being afforded recognition and freedom of speech in policies that affect them. Teachers require support, just practices and opportunities to raise their concerns in order to give effect to their role and hinder their reluctance to fulfil their job descriptions.

The research was carried out with a sample of purposively selected participants, namely teachers and departmental heads. The participants' perceptions were interrogated using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Document analysis was also employed to corroborate the data gathered through interviews and focus group discussions. The NPA as well as the NPPPR were analysed. These documents guide the promotion and progression process at schools.

The findings indicate that the challenges teachers are confronted with deny them the opportunity to implement the policy effectively. Teachers are not ready to accept and implement the policy, because of its effects on learners and the way teachers perceive it. Although the findings reveal that teachers had not undergone training in the implementation of the policy, some schools had remediation strategies in place to assist the affected learners. It was evident that teachers needed training, as a large number of them confessed to using the traditional one-size-fits-all approach to teaching. Teachers do not consider the range of

abilities of learners, therefore learners continually fall into the progression web. The findings indicate that the progression policy degrades the quality of education if it is not implemented effectively. In South Africa, the progression policy is implemented differently in different schools. Progressed learners suffer stigma, and teachers are unable to provide the necessary support suggested by the progression policy.

From the findings of the interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis, the study made several recommendations: regular monitoring of the policy by the school management team is necessary, there should be bottom-up consultation, alternative ways to teaching should be investigated, inclusive education teachers should be available at schools, and they should cater exclusively for progressed learners' classes, and teachers' grievances should lead to amendments to the policy.

Key words: Perceptions, Progression, Promotion, Retention

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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND
TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Prior to 2013, grade retention was considered a conceptually important measure of education because it afforded underachieving learners a chance to evolve academically and become experts in the studies of their current grade (Kika and Kotze 2019:1). A learner would be retained in the same grade until all pass requirements of learning areas were met. Learner retention and progression have become a debatable issue and a bone of contention amongst stakeholders, teachers and parents, to mention a few. There are different opinions regarding the policy, both negative and positive. To address the issues of grade retention and its effects, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) embraced an automatic progression policy. The policy was launched in 2013 and was fully executed by 2015 (Mogale and Modipane 2021:1). This policy prevents a learner from being retained in a phase for more than four years, on condition that the learner's underachievement is managed in the grade to which the learner is progressed to. Number of years in a phase and age cohort restricts a learner from repeating the same phase more than once.

In reaction to high retention and dropout rates in South African primary schools, the Department of Education implemented a social progression policy in a bid to realise every learners' right to basic education. This policy is also employed in secondary schools in South Africa, however, a learner must satisfy all the National Senior Certificate requirements to complete Grade 12, in order to be awarded a matric certificate.

Progression means moving a learner from a grade to the following grade, in spite of the learner not achieving full compliance with all the promotion specifications (DBE 2012a). The Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools (30) and the National Protocol for Assessment (NPA) make up the progression policy and indicate that learners must advance with their age cohort – the rule for reinstatement and retention is a single year in a single phase. The NPA corresponds with the progression policy by assisting teachers to standardise the recording and reporting processes of learners. Progression, promotion and retention of learners should be based on the recorded information. This policy provides a structure for the supervision of

assessment, documentation of marks and fundamental preconditions for learners' profiles, report cards, recording schedules and programmes for Grades 1–12 (DBE 2012b).

According to the progression policy, learners proceed to the next phase in spite of them having information gaps or comprehension deficits in certain learning areas. These shortcomings could become evident as learners advance in their studies, because content in grades and in subjects is interrelated and acts as a continuum to the next grade, where learners are confronted by more difficult content. Stakeholders associate insufficient readiness with lack of success in tertiary studies and training and with sub-standard primary education, even before hurdles in secondary schools become evident (Maddock and Maroun 2018:204). Difficulties experienced by learners in primary schools often carry over to secondary and tertiary education. Fook and Sidhu (2015:606) report that stumbling blocks for learners include cognitive challenges, failure to become active learners, instructional problems and struggles relating to time management.

The procedure of advancing learners from one class to the next regardless of their educational attainment has separated and classified stakeholders into those against and those embracing the policy (Okurut 2015:85). There is a popular belief that when learners are stagnant and have to repeat a grade, they lose interest and repetition patterns increase. This phenomenon requires the implementation of a progression policy. However, Van der Berg, Van Wyk, Selkirk, Rich and Deghaye (2019:5) announce that, although government has put in place the promotion policy, many schools, including primary schools, do not comply with this policy. Policy implementation is not an automatic affair, it requires full commitment and dedication from those implementing it, in order for it to be claimed successful.

Education policies prescribe what teachers are expected to do. Departmental heads at schools observe the recommendations prescribed for the successful implementation of the automatic class promotion policy to a greater extent than teachers (Tani 2018:87). Teachers are expected to devise effective teaching strategies and pedagogies that will bring progressed learners up to speed, if they fail to do this, they are back to square one, where progress is lacking and poor performance by the learner, teacher and school is likely. Schools are supposed to be characterised by quality teaching and learning processes (Leepo 2015:1). Poor performance of learners therefore reflects badly on the school and its teachers, and learners are denied a proper education.

As a way to curb regular retention in schools, most countries have resorted to progression policies. To varying degrees, progression is applied in countries such as Japan, Korea, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and some states in the United States of America. However, France and some developing nations resort to retaining learners in a bid to refine education (King, Orazem and Paterno 2016:581). African countries such as Cameroon and Uganda employ progression in primary schools. In Cameroon, automatic class promotion is implemented effectively due to some teachers at primary schools being adequately qualified to apply the policy (Tani and Fonkeng 2019:146). The authors claim that automatic promotion is not implemented in grades 2 and 4, though learners in other grades are progressed (Tani and Fonkeng 2019:145). In Cameroon, the implementation of the progression policy is reasonably fruitful because the head teachers comply more with the teaching than the management prescriptions of the policy (Tani 2018:64). In Uganda, social progression is implemented only for Grades 1 to 6, though the practise is opposed by private education providers, teachers, parents, school administration and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Okurut 2018:192).

In South Africa, arguments about learner advancement and education attainment are common, disputable and conflicting (Munje and Maarman 2016:188). Certain scholars regard progression policies as an economic, social and empowerment tool, of which the effects and consequences on learner performance have been widely researched. Researchers indicate that it liberates learners from grade retention and the subjugation they experience when they have to repeat a grade. Walton (2018:11) posits that children struggle emotionally when they are kept in a grade and that there is stigma attached to it. De Wet and Osman (2019:141) report that the economy is growing slowly due to people starting their labour activities only when they are older, as a consequence of learners being retained in grades. Kabay (2016:581) claims that repetition leads to inefficient use of education resources and learners must therefore be progressed to eliminate later school dropout. In light of these findings, Statistics South Africa (2013 cited in Munje and Maarman 2016:188) explain that the approach to progressing learners is intended to reinstate learner respectability and pride, and to contribute to South Africa achieving Millennium Development Goals of primary education achievement for all children, no matter their age.

The successful execution of any education policy is dependent on the teachers who implement it, on how they make sense of it, what they are opposed to and what they regard as

assistance (Mbatha 2016:18). Teacher effectiveness in this regard is tied to student learning outcomes, therefore, support must be given to teachers when they express their views on the progression policy. Teachers are expected to provide support structures for new and progressed learners, which could be a daunting task. Munje and Maarman (2016:189) believe that it is discouraging for teachers to be confronted with learners who are not ready for their new grade. Learners may seem unprepared because they are not up to date with the essential and required content of the grade they have been progressed to (Kika and Koetze 2019:4). This causes pressure for learners, and the progression pattern is often continuous and, eventually, causes learners to exit the primary school phases without sufficient mastery of content knowledge.

The results of research indicate that automatic progression has an impact on learners, both during and after school. The focus of research has been more on the impact of this policy on learners, and not much has been done to examine how teachers perceive the policy. Teachers' behaviour has a massive effect on the learning environment, service delivery and student participation (Madani 2019:102). Learner performance is affected by teachers' attitudes and beliefs. It would, therefore, be useful to determine teachers' perceptions, what works for particular teachers when they are confronted by certain challenges regarding the policy and how the challenges they face can be overcome. It is imperative that teachers' perceptions are investigated. Therefore, the researcher found it appropriate to conduct a study on teachers' perceptions of the implementation of this policy. This study was conducted at primary schools in the Motheo district, with a focus on primary schools in Ladybrand, in Manyatseng Township.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The lenient progression policy has brought into the open a long-festering problem (Burger, Van der Berg and Von Fintel 2013:18). Learners are advanced to the following grade despite not having achieved the stipulated academic prerequisites to proceed. The progression policy may be well intentioned and may decrease repetition rates, but it has lasting impacts on the learners and also on the standard of education. Statements in opposition to the automatic promotion policy indicate that the general standard of education is negatively affected, because the policy puts an end to competitiveness, and demotivates both learners and teachers, therefore degrading the quality of education (Koppernsteiner, 2014; Taye, 2003;

Chohan and Qadir, 2011 all cited in Okurut 2015:86). Advancing learners who have not mastered academic content creates a problematic situation that will eventually threaten learners and teachers alike.

One of the problems is that the policy dwells excessively on the number of learners who are progressed to the following grade, while disregarding the conditions teachers are faced with as a result of its implementation. Teacher morale, proficiency, attitude and opinions regarding the policy are ignored. These experiences and perspectives could otherwise aid in transforming school systems and assist to make amendments as and when necessary. Disregarding teachers' viewpoints eventually leads to a deficit in promoting learning processes and designing lessons accordingly. In view of the problem as stated in this section, the main research question was formulated.

1.3 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

The main, overarching question that triggered the researcher to carry out this research is:

What are the perceptions of teachers on the implementation of the progression policy in primary schools?

1.4 RESEARCH SUB-QUESTIONS

The main research question is divided into the following sub-questions.

- i. What challenges do teachers face in the implementation process of the progression policy?
- ii. What strategies do teachers employ in assisting progressed learners to ensure effective implementation of the policy?
- iii. How do teachers perceive the implementation of the progression policy and its potential effects on student learning?
- iv. What are the stipulations and intent of the progression policy in South Africa and what are the roles of teachers and schools in this regard?

1.5 AIM OF THE STUDY

In an attempt to respond to the research sub-questions, the study pursued the following aim:

The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of teachers on the implementation of the progression policy in primary schools.

1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- i. To discover the challenges teachers face in the implementation of the progression policy;
- ii. To determine the strategies teachers employ in assisting the progressed learners to ensure effective implementation of the policy;
- iii. To establish how teachers perceive the implementation of the progression policy and its potential effects on student learning and
- iv. To identify the stipulations and intend of the progression policy in South Africa, and the roles of teachers and schools in this regard.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is explained by Maree and Nieuwenhuis (2019:57) as a plan of action that researchers adopt when collecting data and analysing, narrating and describing phenomena. Leavy (2017:16) describes methodology as a scheme of how explorations and research advances, and how the distinct components of a research project are combined into a proposal that describes how research plans are accomplished. Methodologies are simply the courses of action or intended actions to follow for collecting data. The following subsections explain how this study was conducted.

1.7.1 Research paradigm

Maree and Jansen (2019:22) state that a paradigm is a viewpoint that conforms to or explains how someone comprehends the world; it is the principles or assumptions that set out the research activity. Researchers analyse phenomena and try to understand the world and the

actions of individuals. In addition to the above explanation, Leavy (2017:12) says that paradigms turn into the focal point of the research and can be thought of as monocles with diverse shapes and frames, with their lenses coloured in multiple ways, and how one perceives anything is influenced by the lens used.

This study was premised on the interpretive paradigm which served as a lens to achieve meaning and understanding. Interpretivism stresses the capability of a human being to establish meaning (Maree and Nieuwenhuis 2019:66). It must be understood that reality can be interpreted in different ways by individuals, as people view reality and construct their beliefs in different and even contrasting ways. These beliefs are combined by principles about ontology (what is the essence of truth?), epistemology (what is the correlation linking the questioner and the known?) and methodology (how do we acquire understanding about the world and how do we know of it?) (Denzin and Lincoln 2018:56). A researcher therefore attempts to comprehend the norms, values and existence of a situation from the participants' experiences, which are aligned with their philosophical outlook. Different philosophical outlooks assist the researcher to understand the diversity related to the production of knowledge.

1.7.2 Research approach

A research approach is considered by Creswell and Creswell (2018:37) to be the ideas and courses of action that stretch the research from wide beliefs to complete methods of collecting, analysing and interpreting data. The research approach is a plan for the way a problem is dealt with. This plan involves several decisions that can be concluded in any sequence that makes sense to the researcher (Creswell and Creswell 2018:37).

This study was conducted using a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is done when there is a need to allow individuals to provide their narratives, to listen to their voices and to comprehend the settings and conditions in which problems and issues are addressed by participants (Creswell and Poth 2018:77). Through the qualitative outlook, the researcher views data from the participants' point of view and makes practical sense of the data obtained. Qualitative research is interpretive, and a dynamic and free-flowing process and it is important for researchers to understand the fundamentals of what they are attempting to do (Cobin and Strauss 2015:1). In order to glean information, the qualitative researcher needs to be unbiased, eager to learn, empathetic, adjustable and be able to listen to individuals

narrating their stories (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey 2020:7). This research study, therefore, focused on the opinions, feelings, and experiences of teachers on the implementation of the progression policy and attempted to discover the strategies they employ in their teaching in order for the policy to be effective.

1.7.3 Research design

The research design is a formulation and plan that is utilised as a guide in the collection and analysis of data (Pandey and Pandey 2015:18). It is, basically, a process for obtaining information about the world or certain phenomenon. Loseke (2016:5) explains a research design simply as an idea on how research should be carried out and a model for conducting a specific research project. A design is the researchers' blueprint of how the study will unfold during the data gathering and analysis process. Creswell and Creswell (2018:46) explain that, in qualitative research, there are several research designs, which include the following: narrative research, ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenological research and case studies.

This study adopted a phenomenological design perspective. According to Moustakas (1994, quoted by Maree and Nieuwenhuis (2019:85), phenomenological studies concentrate on the connotations of different experiences of participants, that is, to establish what an experience denotes for the people who have experienced it and have the ability to furnish a thorough illustration of it. Flick (2022:16) postulates that the descriptions provided by participants direct the researcher's awareness in their attempt to comprehend the lived experiences of participants while they are constructing sense of their experiences for or with the researcher. The focus is on consciousness as encountered from the source as a first-time observer. In this study, it is through this outlook that teachers narrated their personal experiences, which influenced how the researcher perceived the progression policy and its implementation.

1.7.4 Data generation instruments

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews. This enabled the researcher to gather open-ended data, to explore participants' beliefs and feelings about the topic and to search for deeper, personal and delicate matters (De Jonckheere and Vaughn 2019:1). In this way, insight was gained into why teachers are often demotivated to prepare for progressed

learners. After collecting data from the participants individually, the researcher combined the participants in a focus group discussion. Focus group discussions are done to gather certain types of data from specifically selected people. Participants in this type of discussion must have the ability and be prepared to dispense the required information, as they are a representation of the entire population of interest (Shamdasani and Stewart 2015:57). The discussion assisted in providing additional information on the phenomenon, and new thinking among participants was produced, which resulted in a more in-depth discussion.

Data was also collected through document analysis. O’Leary (2017:496) describes document analysis as a tool used in research to collect, review, interrogate and analyse different types of written text as a primary source of research data. The researcher analysed the progression policy itself: what it prescribes for teachers, what the conditions of implementation should be and how the teachers must follow the directives given by the policy. In preparing for progressed learners, teachers are required to put in place possible strategies in their resource files on how they assisted the learners individually to bring them up to standard. The researcher focused on these strategies and checked them against their implementation. The NPA was also scrutinised to determine the types of assessments used by teachers, and whether teachers have recorded all formal tasks accordingly. Leeman and Novak (2017:4) stipulate that there is often already much recorded information about a phenomenon before the researcher initiates their inquiry, if those discourses are captured and stored, they can offer insights for the researcher about the question under investigation.

1.7.5 Population and sampling

A population as defined by Pandey and Pandey (2015:40) is the whole or total mass of people to be observed, which is regarded as the parent group that will later form a sample. Neuman (2014:247) concurs by regarding a population as a summary idea of multiple cases from which a researcher extracts a sample; outcomes are concluded from the sample. A population is, therefore, a collective category or community that is under investigation and from which a sample will be deduced. The population of this study was the school management teams (SMTs) and teachers of all primary schools in the Motheo district. A sample is a selected minute classification of representatives of the entire population and is selected with the intention to gather precise and reliable data about the population (Pandey and Pandey 2015:40). The information obtained is regarded as a depiction of the entire population under

study, which is the population. Sampling is normally based on identifying specimens that can represent a wider population (Bryman 2016:9).

As the sample and representation of the entire population, the researcher purposively selected four schools and four teachers at each school, in other words a total of 16 teachers. The schools were selected based on their geographic location, status and learner enrolment. They are public schools at the same location, with slightly varying learner rolls. Public schools normally have greater numbers of learners enrolled than private schools, which has a considerable effect; the greater the number of learners, the greater the number of teachers and the larger the SMT, which widens the sample and provides more options in case a selected participant decides to opt out. The location was favourable regarding the time and financial expense it would entail to gather data there. There was representation by two teachers from the foundation and intermediate phases respectively. This assisted the researcher to gain insight into the operations and observations of the teachers in different phases. Two SMT members were selected from these schools, preferably departmental heads, as teachers overseeing, monitoring and managing other teachers to ensure that overall day-to-day school operations run smoothly. Departmental heads provide leadership to their respective departments. Departmental heads are tasked with monitoring teachers' efforts and to confirm that teachers adhere to their work descriptions in order to achieve quality teaching and learning. In this study, two departmental heads at one school, from the foundation and intermediate and senior phases were selected, bringing the total number of departmental heads to eight.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature related to the research problem was reviewed and it was discovered that, to effectively implement the progression policy, teachers have to create plans of action that will assist their teaching and the learning of learners. Creating plans of action demotivates and burdens teachers with additional administrative work. Demotivation in a workplace is usually a recipe for disaster and it has adverse effects on production. Information disseminated by the Kagiso Shanduka Trust (2020:Online) indicates that many teachers and education critics have expressed serious reservations regarding the policy; the critics declare that they believe that this approach is "not sustainable" because it burdens teachers with added responsibilities to keep up with learners who could have been retained. It was also brought to light that this

policy has lasting implications for learners, both at school and after school. Social promotion harms learners, as it fails to ensure that all learners have obtained the academic skills and comprehension they require to succeed in school and beyond (Oakes, Lipton, Anderson and Stillman 2018:42). In order to fill the gap in the existing literature, and to investigate what other authors have discovered about this topic, the researcher looked deeper into the way primary school teachers perceive the implementation of the progression policy.

By centring the comprehension of this study and formulating a framework that would illustrate the problem vividly, the study was embedded in social justice theory, which was developed by John Rawls in 1971. Spitz (2011:58) makes it clear that Rawls developed this theory with the aim of preserving people's integrity, through freedom, thought and expression – also freedom of conscience and all political and civil rights that form the core of democracy. People must, therefore, be at liberty to express their thoughts, with the aim of achieving social cooperation.

In the definitions of the theory, social justice as a concept advocates for fairness, democracy and just action amongst individuals within a society. Social justice also advocates for equal distribution of opportunities for personal and social privileges. In relation to education, social justice concerns a fair distribution of resources and just, equitable treatment of students and teachers at teaching and learning institutions as a social environment. Teachers are the people who shape and guide teaching and learning in the classroom, and they need to be accorded power and privilege to delve into the progression policy and its processes. Teachers must be awarded the opportunity to indicate how the policy affects the quality of learning and teaching. If teachers believe that they were not considered on a certain reform or policy, they may delay, change or hinder the implementation of the policy (Carr 2014:4). Teachers' opinions in this regard should not be side lined.

Teachers follow the obligatory policies, instructions, recommendations and programmes by which they are to instruct and engage learners. Often, teachers do not have a say in or contribution to any of the developments of the education system, even though they are part of the teaching activity. As a result, politics emerge in the implementation of the progression policy in schools. Politics separate education stakeholders into those who are against and those who embrace the policy. Both factions are entitled to their opinions and should be granted freedom of expression. In this study, the use of social justice theory provided ground for balanced discussion on the discrepancies generated by the promotion policy, its unjust and

unfair application, as well as its unenviable outcomes. The theory advocates for a just society that upholds democratic values and strives to effect change in social relations, and this is why the researcher decided to employ social justice in this study.

1.9 VALUE OF THE RESEARCH

The study aimed to explain how teachers' perceptions can influence learning and the implementation of policies at schools, specifically the progression policy. It was essential to investigate this phenomenon, as teachers' perceptions inform their actions, and affects teaching and learning in schools. Teachers' perceptions might contradict the education department's policy intentions, causing the policy to be perceived as null and void. Research in this area is vital, because it would assist to uncover the extent to which teachers face challenges when they implement the policy. The study was envisaged to add to the existing body of understanding of the way teachers apply strategies to help progressed learners and to ensure the effectiveness of the policy. The findings would contribute to the development of teachers, and inform policymakers on how to ascertain if policies are well implemented and how to monitor their implementation. The DBE would be the main beneficiary of this study, followed by policymakers and SMTs. The teachers would gain insight into whether the policy is effective or not, and whether it is being implemented successfully. From the responses of participants regarding the way they assist progressed learners, the researcher, as a teacher, would also be a beneficiary, because there would be broader understanding derived from newly emerging education concepts. Stakeholders need to ensure that the quality of education in schools is up to standard.

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher, firstly, requested permission and ethical clearance to conduct the study from the research ethics committee at the University of the Free-State. The researcher sought authorisation to conduct the research from the Department of Education, district circuit office and principals of the four schools that were selected. The participants were the primary source of information and, because of them, the study became attainable. The researcher, therefore, had to consider their thoughts and aim for the highest level of confidentiality and respect. To engage the participants in the study, they first had to understand what the research entailed, its nature and all the necessary procedures and methods to be followed. The

researcher also made it clear to them that if any of them as participants wished to withdraw, for whatever reasons, they were entitled to do so. The participants completed a consent form as agreement to participate in the study. Consent to record the interviews was sought and the identities of the participants were kept confidential, as were the names of the schools. The researcher also pledged to the participants that their responses would not be provided to any unauthorised users or people who have power over them. Their opinions were highly regarded in this study.

1.11 DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

In order to develop greater understanding, the following concepts in the study are explained.

1.11.1 Perceptions

Teachers' perceptions refer to their sense of discernment, including their needs, attitudes, stresses and anxieties relating to events. It alludes to what they perceive, be it out of fear or interest in something (Ramabulana 2017:15). In this study, perceptions were regarded as attitudes, opinions and beliefs held by teachers regarding the implementation of the progression policy in primary schools. These perceptions influence the way teachers behave and act in relation to the policy and its implementation.

1.11.2 Progression

Progression refers to the elevation of a learner from one grade to the following (excluding grade R), in spite of the learner not having achieved all the promotion stipulations (DBE 2012a). Chohan (as quoted by Tani 2018:8) elaborates that progression refers to the exercise in both primary and secondary schools of upgrading learners from one grade to the following despite the learners not making the cut at the end of the year. Due to certain factors and influences, learners are progressed to the next grade without having met minimum stipulations (Adonis 2021:1). In this empirical study, it was found that learners in both the foundation and intermediate phases were progressed to the next grade even though they did not meet the requirements.

1.11.3 Promotion

Promotion means that the learner has met the minimum requirements set by the system to be advanced to the next grade. It means the learner has passed the grade and is academically ready for the next grade. Promotion, as explained by Tani (2018:68), means the advancing or proceeding from one grade or level to next and is mainly determined by formative and summative evaluation. Learners are advanced to next grade based on their scores or marks derived from summative and formative assessments. Learners need to attain minimum requirements set by the system. Adonis (2021:1) concurs that promotion is a term used when the learner has met the minimum pass requirements as set out in the assessment instruction 65 of 2012.

1.11.4 Retention

Retention refers to holding back a learner in a particular grade for another year (Cathey 2015:6). It is normally done when a learner does not fulfil the promotion stipulations and is seen as an opportunity for improvement. Grade retention, alternatively known as failing or holding back a learner, is a habitual procedure for schools when they notice a learner does not meet or perform at the school's benchmark level (Pearson 2018:1). In South Africa, learners in primary school are only allowed to repeat once in a phase. Khobe (2021:14) describes retention as the act of retaining failing learners in a certain grade for one more year as a substitute cure for learners conflicting with the progression rule.

1.11.5 Stakeholders

Stakeholders are typically people who are associated with the wellbeing and success of a school and its learners, such as parents, teachers and school heads (Warsi 2018). In this study, it refers to teachers, DBE and SMTs, who are involved in the implementation of the progression policy. Various departments and institutions, such as Health, Correctional Services and Social Welfare, municipalities and the South African Police Service (SAPS) also participate in the development of school activities and assist in promoting the wellbeing and success of schools.

1.11.6 School management teams

An SMT is a body of administrators set up to work on a certain project or to execute a particular function in an organisation (Ntseto 2015:17). These are the people who hold formal leadership positions, such as the principal, deputy principal and departmental heads. They play a role in guiding teachers and non-teaching staff in the school. The study focused particularly on departmental heads, because they work with teachers and oversee teaching and learning, and report to the principal on any developments.

1.12 LAYOUT OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 – Introduction and conceptual background to the study

Chapter 2 – Literature review and theoretical framework

Chapter 3 – Research methodology

Chapter 4 – Data analysis, presentation and interpretation of findings

Chapter 5 – Summary, recommendation and conclusion of the study

1.13 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter provided the conceptual background to the study topic. The researcher presented the research problem and the aim of the study. The research methodology was outlined and key terms were described in order to elucidate and clarify their meaning. The next chapter will focus on reviewing literature pertaining to the progression policy and how teachers perceive its implementation. It will also refer to consistencies and controversies similar to that of this study topic, in order to identify the gaps in the literature.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of teachers on the implementation of the school progression policy in primary schools. This research study was motivated by the fact that learners are advanced to the following class without having met the stipulated requirements, leaving the teachers with the undesirable task of bringing these learners up to par with other learners in that grade, to the benefit of the advanced learner. This practice does not only put pressure on the teacher, but also on the learner, because the learner is not prepared for the higher grade. What necessitated this study is a need to determine the perceptions teachers have on the implementation of this policy, because these perceptions influence their actions and learners' performance. This information would also assist teachers, to liberate their thoughts, from a situation in which their practices are controlled and they have no voice to express grievances about the policy, to one where they can actively and positively participate in the conception of policies that guide their work, in this instance, the progression policy.

When implementing a policy, it is crucial to investigate teachers' beliefs, since they can play either a facilitating or an inhibiting role in translating the policy into daily reality of what happens in a classroom. Teachers' perceptions ought to be considered in order to prevent a mismatch between what the official policy prescribes and actual implementation of the policy by teachers in their classrooms. Mogale and Modipane (2021:2) report that the inclusion of teachers in the creation and formation of policy is a key aspect that must be given attention, rather than engaging them only during implementation. Teachers' lived experiences are important and could assist in enriching policy implementation and its outcomes. Ramputla (2020:14) claims that many education policies would be successful if the experiences of teachers and learners were investigated in the same depth as challenges are. Numerous international, regional and national studies indicate that the schooling outcomes of South Africa are exceptionally poor, as a large number of people expand on what needs to be done to improve schooling (Chisolm 2019:1). It is of great significance to take cognisance of what transpires within the education system, especially in relation to the policies that dictate the rules, laws and principles governing schools.

This chapter commences with a review of existing literature, and progress to providing a framework that is suitable for and justifies the study in pursuit of its objectives. The researcher will discuss literature that responds to the objectives of the study and which is related to the phenomenon being explored. The chapter will re-examine and review what other authors have uncovered regarding constructs that guided the study, to enable the researcher to interpret and make sense of the empirical data that were acquired. The attitudes and opinions of teachers on the implementation of the policy will be justified by literature from other countries, which were studied as a means to address the objectives of the study. In this case, social justice was found fitting for underpinning the study, because of its tenets regarding human rights, participation and access to education.

2.1 CHALLENGES TEACHERS FACE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

Munje and Maarman (2016:195) state that the progression policy in schools is characterised by a series of confrontations and inferences in relation to learner performance, due to its lack of a sharply outlined formation and implementation strategy. Emphasising this point, Adonis (2021:12) explains that the implementation of the progression policy has developed into major challenges for parents and learners alike; teachers also perceive progression as a challenge. Stott, Dreyer and Venter (2015:98) report that progressed learners are often demotivated, inadequate, stubborn and incompetent, they skip classes and extra classes, do not do their homework and are slow, and they are a burden to teachers. The following section will highlight challenges teachers face when implementing the policy.

2.1.1 Lack of resources, infrastructure and support for teachers

Education resources refer to all personal, physical and non-physical audio-visual academic area and community materials available in a school environment to simplify and promote teaching, administration and learning processes (Usman, cited by Tani and Fonkeng 2019:147). Tani (2018:72) claims that one of the challenges is that teachers are not supported enough by their school management and education department inspectorate, whilst principals claim they do not get sufficient time to keep track of and support teachers as required, because of excessive teaching load and other administrative duties. Teachers are not offered the training they need to support progressed learners. Teachers use their discretion and apply

a one-size-fits-all approach by subjecting learners to similar pedagogic strategies and assessment methods, irrespective of their abilities and interests.

Another challenge that increases the number of progressed learners is the lack of resources. Without resources, progressed learners suffer because learning is generally more effective when resources are available in schools (Moagi 2020:3). Expanding on this notion, Ndaba (2020:37) observes that resources play a remarkable role in improving problem-solving, moulding learners' minds, and assisting them to collect new knowledge, especially when they are participating in practical work, as it helps them to discover hidden facts, come up with new principles and link it to what they see, feel, hear and write down. This is in line with the saying *I hear I forget, I see and remember, I do and I understand*. Nkosi and Adebayo (2021:201) remark that progressed learners need additional resources to improve their schoolwork, and there is an outcry in schools about the shortage of resources and educators. Employing resources for teaching and learning helps learners to obtain understanding through observations and descriptions of various objects (Ndaba 2020:37).

Infrastructure, too, is one of the crucial components of the teaching and learning. This study will refer to the number of learners per teacher, and classroom capacity. Teachers are often overloaded by classrooms crowded with learners who have been retained or progressed, in addition to learners who were rightfully promoted from the previous grade. Often, the learner-teacher ratio is exceeded, making it difficult or improbable for the educator to give the necessary attention to all learners, especially progressed learners who need more attention. The unmanageability of classes makes it unworkable for educators to provide quality teaching to learners, because the increase in the number of students does not correlate with resource availability (Nkosi and Adebayo 2021:201).

2.1.2 Lack of parental support, socio-economic factors and high absenteeism

Parental involvement certainly affects the academic performance of a splinter group of learners, and promotes better grades, elevates test scores, makes school attendance more consistent, improves social skills, enhances behaviour and a constructive attitude towards learning (Jeynes 2003:202). Moagi (2020:202) reports that parents who do not participate in their children's schooling are often oblivious of the challenges confronting their children, and learners from such contexts are susceptible to failure because of issues such as absenteeism and class boycotts. Moreover, parents' literacy levels and own inadequate education also

cause problems for learners, as parents cannot assist learners with homework. Maluleke (2014:19) reports that, if English is not the vernacular language of a parent, they believe that their academic expertise is so poor that they cannot help their child with school and homework. This mostly disadvantages learners who do not speak English at home, but who have English as the language of teaching and learning. Ultimately, learners confronted by these challenges do not make the cut and are progressed to the next grade, either because they have failed before or are no longer in the appropriate age cohort.

Conditions at the homes of learners primarily form the basics of social issues influencing the interest and desire of learners to learn (Quaicoe 2014:10). Moagi (2020:3) declares that included under the challenges of progressed learners are socio-economic factors, such as being a member of child-headed family, where assistance with academic work is minimal. Some of the reasons why a child ends up heading a family is the death of parents, or having ignorant and unavailable parents. Such children are generally affected by poverty, which means they have to skip school to search for money. They also have to keep up with household chores and take care of their siblings, even when they themselves need monitoring and supervision. Often, these kinds of learners do not perform optimally, because they are affected mentally and emotionally and their school attendance is poor.

The financial capability of parents is another factor that impacts progressed learners and their motivation to work hard. Children look up to their parents as role models, and when families are financially stable, this acts as extrinsic motivation for children to work hard at school to eventually settle in a good career and become a functional individual. Also, parents need to pay for academic necessities such as stationery, food, tuition fees and transport for their school-going children. If parents cannot afford to pay for these necessities, it may affect the learner's state of mind and self-esteem, resulting in low grades for the learner. This claim is confirmed by the findings of Nkosi and Adebayo (2021:200) that high poverty levels deprive many families of access to basic needs, consequently affecting learners' attentiveness to learning and creating obstacles for them to learn. Moneva, Pestano and Vertulfo (2020:9) confirm that there is a significant association between parental financial support and learners' motivation to learn. Sesinyi (2021:3) claims that the deteriorating parental involvement compromises classroom practices, expected learner behaviour, effective school attendance, and general academic performance.

2.1.3 Low levels of skills, literacy and numeracy

Teachers' morale is affected when they have to teach learners who are not actually ready to be in the class, as their numeracy and literacy levels are not what they are expected to be (Adonis 2021:6). Teachers become discouraged when they are exposed to unprepared learners in their classrooms, and automatically advancing learners poses challenges for teachers. There is often a high likelihood that these learners will struggle to cope with the content of their current grades (Picklo and Christenson 2005, quoted by Munje and Maarman 2016:189). The Human Sciences Research Council (2016) shares a similar view by indicating that learners may find it challenging to cope with data and information in a certain grade, and this may lead to learners being discouraged and frustrated. Learners need to be in a position to read texts silently and out loud, and write out words and sentences eloquently if they are to keep up with academic content that needs to be well read and written, and they are to become independent learners.

In schools, learners are developed to enter the labour market and be competent in what they are assigned to do. Education has been considered relevant in human development because it provides an interface between the workplace and schools. One of the harmful effects of the progression policy is that it creates low-skill-level learners who cannot be competent in the labour market and will do little to curb the unemployment rate in the country (Makhanya 2021:36).

2.1.4 Low learner self-esteem

Self-esteem refers to a satisfying judgement of one's own personality and potential (Chataa and Nkengbeza 2019:1735). Mawhinney, Irby and Roberts (2016:156) report that some learners lose their confidence and motivation as a result of their inability to keep pace with material taught in their current grade. This is because they are intimidated by other learners who seem to have mastery of the content. This is consistent with Beere's (2016) opinion that progressed learners' social development and self-esteem are affected because they are stigmatised, provoked and labelled throughout their school years. Both teachers and learners discriminate against progressed learners. When learners struggle in class, they don't trust themselves and care little about their schoolwork (Makhanya 2021:38). Low self-esteem

inevitably causes learners to experience fear and anxiety, become unmotivated, have low resilience, poor social relationships and a weak sense of themselves.

2.1.5 Disciplinary and behavioural problems

Despite the fact that the School Progression Policy aims to offer progressed learners a helping hand so that they can, eventually, exit the academic system with a qualification, it is evident that most progressed learners still experience academic hurdles and behavioural matters (Khobe 2021:3). Khobe (2021:3) explains that progressed learners often display behavioural problems, including harassing and stealing from their classmates. Normally, learners do this to boost their confidence and manage pressure from unmet expectations, leading to them indirectly venting their frustrations on other learners in an attempt to make them feel better about themselves. They become bullies when they feel inferior, so they indulge in behaviour that could divert attention from the fact that they are struggling with their schoolwork.

What the research reports is evident in schools, where learners misbehave, fail to do their work, and have no care at all for their schoolwork because they know about the policy and that they will pass regardless (Makhanya 2021:3). Nkosi and Adebayo (2021:202) hint that educators are endangered, and learners face fewer consequences if they misbehave and do not complete their assignments. Makhanya (2021:36) clarifies that misbehaviour limits learning and interrupts teaching and learning for the entire class when time has to be directed to disciplining these learners. Chataa and Nkengbeza (2019:1737) report that learners who have failed but who have been intentionally advanced may also cause disturbances in class because they feel that they already know the learning material.

Figure 2.1 presents the challenges facing the automatic promotion policy.

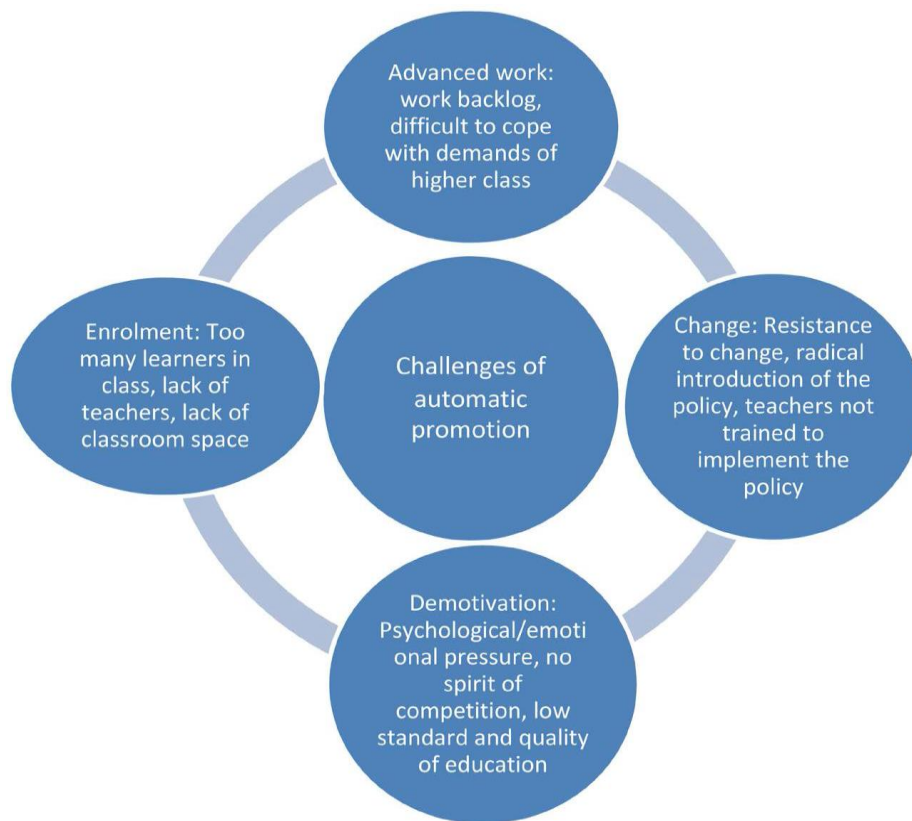


Figure 2.1: Challenges facing the automatic promotion policy

Source: Chataa and Nkengbeza (2019:1738)

2.2 STRATEGIES TEACHERS EMPLOY TO ASSIST PROGRESSED LEARNERS

Although the policy states that learners who have been advanced by means of their age cohort, theoretically, and the number of times they have repeated a grade, statistically, must be offered the required assistance to help them manage the difficulties of the current grade, how and when that support should be given and by whom is not specified, which could lead to negligence and misunderstandings on the part of the teachers regarding policy implementation (Munje and Maarman 2016:194). This means teachers do what they find fit, and this could either be right or wrong, with the probability of yielding negative or bad results, because the policy does not clearly outline the essentials of its implementation. Ramputla (2020:24) specifies that teachers are not offered training on how to implement policies, but they are expected to offer support to learners on every policy that is designated to them. Kika and Kotze (2019:13) disclose that teachers are incapable of and lack skill to

offer diversified support to progressed learners; the circumstances are aggravated by teachers' heavy workloads. Teachers usually hold the opinion that progressed learners are a part of the general academic community within the grade or age cohort, consequently they do not identify the progressed learners and offer them special support. This claim is supported by Knight (2014 quoted by Ramputla 2020:20), who says that the progressed learner is not picked or singled out for mediation to attempt to address the problem areas that have led to prior grade repetition and ensuing progression. It seems the DBE has not yet taken into consideration the unexpected effects of the impact of the policy, because it still expects teachers to account for learners' failures. Teachers have become passive because they know learners will be progressed whether they walk the extra mile, or not.

The progression policy indicates that progressed learners must be supported to adjust to the demands of the grade they are in, so as to break the cycle of progression. In terms of techniques to assist learners, the progression policy indicates that districts and schools must possess clearly spelled out mediating techniques, which must include timely identification of low achievers or at-risk learners, so that the school, district and province can develop and apply additional learning opportunities (Kika and Kotze 2019:4). It is mandatory for teachers to devise support strategies in the classroom to aid learners who have been socially promoted, to align their academic level with those of their peers, so they do not fall in an ongoing cycle of progression and failure to meet the necessary promotion requirements (Brahmbhatt 2020:3). Teachers should apply a variety of pedagogic skills to enhance their teaching, both in and out of classroom, in order to bring progressed learners up to speed. The success of this policy depends on the support given to learners and teachers alike. The following section will discuss the strategies teachers employ to maximise teaching and learning for progressed learners.

2.2.1 Differentiated instruction

Teaching and learning needs to be tailored to meet individual needs; because learners are different, so are their needs. The traditional way of teaching – talk and chalk – is becoming out-dated. Differentiation means utilising various teaching strategies and means to accommodate the needs of mixed capability groups in the classroom (Brahmbhatt 2020:20). This view is supported by Moagi (2020:40) who explains that differentiated instruction is a representation of teaching that raises awareness and offers attention to different learners in

the same class, and acknowledges that learners have differing cognitive levels, abilities, challenges and learning styles.

With progressed learners, it is vital to obtain information from the learners' previous teachers or learner profiles regarding the needs or problems of the learners. Learners are progressed for various reasons, therefore, it is important that the teacher understands the progressed learners from the start, before starting to teach them (Moagi 2020:41). The teacher has to understand learners' readiness, interests and comprehension abilities. Same content may be taught to all learners using varied instructional approaches, or it may demand that a teacher offers lessons at differing levels of complexity, based on the ability of each learner.

2.2.2 Interactive instruction

This type of pedagogy entails two-way communication between students and teachers. The advantage of communication is that learners do not sit passively while awaiting information and instruction from their teacher. They get actively engaged in their learning process and adjust quickly to the approaches and processes that are applied. Interactive instruction helps learners to interact with each other with the common goal of enabling both sides to understand the learning content by the end of the interaction, because the leading goal is to explain the learning content to each other, with some asking questions and others responding as a way of clarifying (Moagi 2020:48). Doing so enhances the learners' zone of proximal development, through which the learners being assisted gain ability, and the assisting learners stop directing them at some stage, until the learners are able to do the task themselves.

2.2.3 Remedial teaching

Remedial comes from the word remedy, and refers to treatment or cure of an already existing problem. The teacher creates time to present remedial lessons for learners who struggle or lag behind in class in regarding their academic performance. Normally learners struggle with basics of writing, reading or maths and if teachers and learners have the right attitude, remedial classes could yield positive results. Remedial teaching involves identifying specific complications, offering appropriate remedial measures and providing support to prevent the problems from reoccurring in future (Selvarajan and Vasanthagumar 2022:285).

In the case of progressed learners, every teacher must consider preparing a separate programme of teaching, to offer progressed learners extra time to interact with the teacher independently and at their own, individual pace (Moagi 2020:37). Moagi continues to explain that every learner's challenge must be pointed out, noted down and attached to the learner's name, as a way of making preparations for the mediation during expanded opportunities that these learners should be afforded in line with the created schedule (Moagi 2020:37). Stott et al. (2015:98) make it clear that this process is exhausting to teachers, as they have to offer extra classes in the afternoons and on weekends.

2.2.4 Integrating content with information communication technologies

Technology is becoming increasingly important and complicated in a fast-paced and evolving world, and it becomes necessary to engage technology in contemporary classrooms to assist all learners of varying abilities. Alemu (2015:2) declares that, due to the increasing value of ICT (information communication technologies) in education, educators and students must employ ICT to enhance, enrich and support their teaching and learning projects. For progressed learners, it becomes obligatory to provide them with expanded opportunities to keep them on par with their counterparts. Kolobe and Mihai (2020:318) concur that ICT is an instrument that provides progressed learners with information, describes processes and makes it possible to use games and videos for illustration purposes. Teachers can also employ some applications to conduct informal baseline assessments, promote understanding of content or verify whether the objectives of the lesson have been achieved through formal assessment (Kolobe and Mihai 2020:318).

2.3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRESSION POLICY AND ITS EFFECTS

The School Progression Policy, in some countries known as the social promotion policy or automatic promotion policy, has become a bone of contention and it is gaining popularity as a high dropout rate mitigation option, but researchers and stakeholders such as teachers still have reservations towards it. The policy has turned into an educational operation in most schools and countries, but it has not escaped its share of criticism, and has stimulated arguments (Mawhinney et al. 2016:16). Various countries have adopted this policy for various reasons, though, for most countries, the main reason is to lower high dropout rates. Other countries apply it for social reasons, hence, the term social promotion. If a learner is

not advanced with their peers, they may experience psychological or emotional effects, and ultimately drop out. In some countries, it is done for economic reasons.

Often, education policies of Western countries are adopted by South Africa, and the Department of Education states that they are motivated by seeing the success other countries achieve in education (Makhanya 2021:29). According to the report of Stott et al. (2015:93), the DBE has defended the progression policy and has standardised it because of its effectiveness in countries such as Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Korea, Japan and the United Kingdom. Stott et al. (2015:94) continue to explain that these are all developed countries that have strong remediation in place and who perform outstandingly in comparative tests.

Tani (2018:70) indicates that progression policies are executed in some Latin American countries such as Bolivia, Peru, Costa Rica, Chile, Venezuela and Brazil, where retention has been abolished in some grades, especially in the initial grades of primary school. It is important to consider the context of these countries in comparison to that of South Africa in order for this policy to be successful here too. Different countries possess different education structures and levels of education attainment, so, simply presuming that what works in one country or region will automatically work in another is a blatant misinterpretation (Okurut 2015:87).

In African countries, for instance Uganda, social progression is implemented only in Grades 1 to 6. It is opposed by private providers, teachers, parents, school administration and NGOs (Okurut 2018:192). In Cameroon, the implementation of the progression policy in primary schools is satisfactory, because departmental heads observe the teaching rather than the administrative recommendations of the policy (Tani 2018:64). This is the best strategy, because teaching and learning happens more through a variety of pedagogy than through administrative efforts. The policy seems to be implemented effectively in Cameroon by following the clearly stated prescriptions of the policy: 1) the teaching methods should be functional and suited to the distinctiveness of learners; 2) assessment should be indicative, developmental or benchmarked at levels; 3) assessment should authorise teachers to vary their lessons to match the needs of certain learners; and 4) promotion of learners is automatic within a level (Tani 2018:65).

Tani and Fonkeng (2019:146) pronounce that, in Cameroon, there is automatic progression from Grades 1 to 2, 3 to 4 and 5 to 6. This means grade repetition is permitted only in the

second and fourth grades. Nevertheless, a learner can, in exceptional circumstances, and upon request from the parent or guardian, be allowed to repeat these grades (Tani and Fonkeng 2019:146). They explain further that the policy is implemented effectively in Cameroon, because the majority of teachers have attained capabilities in the implementation of the automatic promotion policy through seminars and workshops (Tani and Fonkeng 2019:150).

The progression policy was developed to decrease high dropout rates globally, nonetheless, the unsuccessful implementation of this policy negates its good intentions (Mogale and Modipane 2021:1). Munje and Maarman (2016:186) add that, although the school progression policy speaks of determination and caring, challenges related to implementation and follow-up negatively impact the educational progress of primary school learners. In order for the implementation of the policy to be successful, accurate implementation of both administrative and pedagogic recommendations must be followed in a coherent way. Okurut (2015:96) adds that compulsory and sufficient conditions for productive teaching and learning processes must be determined, formulated and maintained, in order to ensure social promotion is a feasible option.

Many teachers have a negative attitude towards the progression policy and this constitutes a hindrance to the effective implementation of the policy (Tani 2018:86). Khobe (2021:4) notes that education stakeholders, researchers and policymakers have become disturbed by the effects of the policy on learners. Ineffective implementation has unfruitful effects on learners. The following section will discuss the effects learners experience as a result of substandard implementation of the progression policy.

2.3.1 It demotivates learners and destroys the spirit of competition

The policy discourages learners from recognising the value of education, and to put the necessary effort in their studies. Stott et al. (2015:93) established that one of the concerns regarding the progression policy is that learners become demotivated and uncommitted due to the removal of the threat effect of grade repetition. Also, when learners realise that their teachers seem to accept their failings, they stop trying and consequently enter a stage of learned helplessness, where they do not feel they are achieving a goal (Chataa and Nkengbeza 2019:1737). They explain that this policy demotivates learners, who are impassive and who do not exert the effort to exhibit an ambitious and competing spirit (Chataa and Nkengbeza 2020:1738). The policy may demotivate learners to learn at all, as

any learner can now be advanced without meeting the required academic standard (Makhanya 2021:3). The policy demotivates promoted learners from working hard, because they feel the progressed learners enjoy the same benefits as they do, without having invested in hard work and dedication towards their studies.

2.3.2 Learners drop out without attaining literacy

As much as the social progression policy aims to combat high dropout rates, this goal is not necessarily achieved. Some progressed learners ultimately drop out of school owing to the frustration of having failed a grade and being progressed (Khobe 2021:3). Brahmbhatt (2020:14) elaborates that a large number of learners in South Africa cannot read, write and understand at the level that is appropriate for their current grade and age. This may be due to multiple reasons. The problem with a reading deficit is that reading underpins everything else learners do at school. So, if they cannot read at the level that is required, they are likely to struggle and eventually drop out due to a literacy crisis. Even in the event of these learners completing Grade 12, their low levels of literacy and career maturation remains a problem. Wisdom is required to ensure that they make advanced and practical career decisions pertaining to their futures (Grossen, Grobler and Lacante 2017:8).

2.3.3 Deterioration of the quality of Grade 12 results

The implementation of the progression policy led to the 2014 Grade 12 group comprising the greatest number of learners who ever sat for matric examinations. The national pass rate declined from 75.8% in 2014 to 70.7% in 2015 DBE (2015). The first group of progressed learners reached Grade 12 in 2014 (Stott et al. 2015:91). The progression policy is cited to be the reason for the decline of the 2015 matric results (Ramputla 2020:4). Emphasising this point, Grossen et al. (2017:7) report that progressed learners seem to experience complications in their attempts to achieve their Grade 12 certificates, because they cannot cope with the subject matter. This means the policy's intention of reducing dropout rates and encouraging learners to complete to Grade 12 is being defeated.

Spraul (2013 quoted by Brahmbhatt 2020:15) states that, out of 100 learners who enrol for Grade 1, 50 will drop out before Grade 12 and only 40 will pass the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination; ultimately only 12 will qualify to attend university.

Brahmbahtt (2020:15) finds these statistics alarming, because this has implications for the job market, employment rates and wages, which will influence the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

Kika and Kotze (2019:1) state that the dropout and progression rates in the FET (further education and training) phase are cause for concern, given the value attached to it in determining post-school outcomes and labour market access. After the policy was introduced, learners who had not completed Grade 12 tended to enrol in post-schooling options that do not require a matric qualification, that is, vocational training, certificates and diplomas that do not require matric (Kika and Kotze 2019:13). Comparably, learners who attain matric with a low average are confronted with the challenge of not being recognised by and absorbed into the labour market, and they cannot access tertiary education (Makhanya 2021:3).

2.4 STIPULATIONS OF THE POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA AND ROLES OF TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

The National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) Grade R–12 guides teaching and learning in South Africa and consists of the NPPPR of the National Curriculum Statements Grades R–12 and the NPA. The NCS outlines the number of course disciplines to be provided to learners in each grade, together with the necessary promotion preconditions. The NPA standardises the recording and reporting processes for grades R–12 within the framework. These policy documents detail how learners are to be promoted, retained or progressed to the next grade. Promotion, in this instance, is defined by Le Roux (2013:3) as the movement of a learner from one grade to the next when that learner meets the minimum required level of achievement per subject in a particular grade. The NPA (2011) points out that recording and reporting of learner performance in the foundation phase should be against four subjects, in the intermediate phase against six subjects, and in Grade 7, which is the senior phase, recording must be against nine subjects.

The Government Gazette 36041 (2012) and the NPA vividly state how learners in Grades 1 to 12 are to be promoted according to the CAPS. In the foundation phase, a learner has to meet the following requirements: Home Language level 4, first additional language level 3, mathematics level 3. In the intermediate phase: first additional language level 3, home language level 4, mathematics level 3 plus level 3 in any other two remaining subjects. In the senior phase, which is Grade 7, learners are promoted if they have complied with the

promotion requirements in at least eight of their subjects. They must obtain level 4 home language, level 3 in first additional language, level 3 in mathematics and level 3 in the remaining six subjects.

Moagi (2020:1) demonstrates that the progression of learners in South Africa was established to prevent a learner from being kept in a phase for a period longer than four years. Kika and Kotze (2019:4) add that, since 1998, repetition in South Africa has been limited to one year per schooling phase. The progression policy seeks to guarantee that a learner progresses through a phase with the appropriate age group. Munje and Maarman (2016:187–188) explain that a learner must be promoted if they have been retained once in a phase or grade. The policy provides that a learner is offered a chance to progress with their age group. This is consistent with what Khobe (2021:2) reports, that, fundamentally, the social progression policy is an organised mediation that is targeted at curbing the holding back of learners, by limiting schools from retaining struggling learners in the school system for more than one year in any three-year phase.

The Department of Education (quoted by Kika and Kotze 2019:5) reveals that there are several challenges within the education system regarding implementation of the progression policy. Firstly, numerous interpretations of the policy are in play in the system, resulting in diverse implementation at schools. Secondly, the system relating to multiple examination opportunities is viewed as a procedure to manipulate the pass rate of a school. Thirdly, progressed learners are stigmatised and carry the label throughout their schooling years. Lastly, teachers provide little or no differentiated support to progressed learners because teachers already face heavy workloads. The policy recommends that various consultation measures ought to be carried out with teachers, parents and learners during the implementation process (DBE 2015). The DBE (2013) states that schools must offer progressed learners added support to address their specific subject inadequacies, so that learners are able to cope with the needs of the following grade. Parents, teachers and learners need to work in unison during the implementation of the policy, and teachers are expected to put in the extra effort. However, the DBE fails to note differences in the degree of learner needs and challenges, and the number of learners who need support in each grade at a certain time (Nkosi and Adebayo 2021:196). Schools are at liberty to establish their individual, workable strategies to assist progressed learners. However, the system may not prevent a learner from moving to the next grade, even if the learners did not meet the academic

requirements for promotion (Hartley 2006:100, quoted by Munje and Maarman 2016:188). Parents or guardians of the identified learners are required to make the decision whether a learner can be progressed (Mogale and Modipane 2021:2).

2.5 MONITORING OF PROGRESSION POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

December marks the completion of an academic year in South Africa and at this time, learners are faced with two probabilities: either they have failed and need to be retained or progressed, or they have passed and are upgraded (Brahmbhatt 2020:3). At this time, the DBE becomes part of the implementation process and observes the implementation of the progression policy. The policy specifies that particular provincial education departments are expected to monitor the implementation of the progression policy at all schools in order to ensure adherence with the policy (DBE 2012b). Observation is done by the principals and provincial education departments through their circuit managers, mainly at the end of each academic year.

To guarantee adherence, a provincial education department undertakes the following procedure, through the district office: conducts regular inspection of learner mark schedules and report cards to ensure that progressions are carried out in line with the policy; a checklist is developed by the province for use during the execution of spot checks, which must be completed by the circuit manager or official conducting the spot check, after which, the checklist must be signed by the principal as acknowledgement that the school has complied with the stipulations of the promotion and progression requirements (Ramputla 2020:25). The DBE (2015) stipulates that the provincial education department must verify that a learner has failed a grade before, or that the learner is in the appropriate age cohort, before the learner can be progressed.

2.5.1 Debates around the progression policy

Education policies evoke mixed views and opinions: happiness amongst advocates of transition and stress in teachers expected to implement the policy (Ntumbela 2011 quoted by Ramputla 2020:12). The following section will report on opinions on the implementation of the policy. Statistics South Africa (2013) claims that the policy assists in attaining South

Africa's Millennium Development Goal relating to ensuring that all children finish primary school education, regardless their age, because all children are entitled to basic education, regardless their social, economic and religious status. (Owen and Ranick 2010 quoted by Ramputla 2020:5) argue that schools work tirelessly to bring learners up to acceptable standards by offering intense learning sessions to meet slower learners' needs, therefore they recommend that learners are progressed and placed in classes with their peers according to their age, and that limited promotion is granted to learners who attain most of their grade skills.

Other researchers, such as Aldridge and Goldman (1999, quoted by Chataa and Nkengbeza (2019:1733), claim that one of the paramount advantages of progressing a learner who is intellectually incapable of functioning at their current grade to the following grade is offering that learner a chance to be exposed to learners of their age as models in the class. Role models are anticipated to have a positive impact on progressed learners in that these learners will look up to them and get encouragement to perform well in their studies too, they will also get a chance to learn in relationships or social associations with their peer cohort. For these learners, advancing into a higher grade with friends, companions and age-mates is important for social development (Beere 2016). According to Kika and Kotze (2019:3), another reason the progression policy is repudiated relates to consideration of capacity restrictions in a grade to enrol more learners.

As claimed by Stott et al. (2015:92), the economic effects of retaining learners are high. These effects do not only include the costs of having extra learners in the system, but financial drawbacks these learners will face when they discontinue school. Stott et al. (2015:92) recommend that learners must be progressed, so that they eventually make it out of the school system and relieve their parents and the government of the financial pressures of keeping them in school. Expanding this notion, Okurut (2018:191) holds that, since education is a public service, provided under a cost-sharing arrangement involving the government and households, with government covering learner's instructional material, teachers' salaries, and households covering associated costs, such as stationery and uniforms, retaining learners would result in a waste of resources.

Presuming that a learner who was held back graduates from high school, they will lose at least a year of full-time employment, and what is viewed as the gift of time by some, is, in the long run, taken away from that learner (Moran 1989 quoted by Pearson 2018:6). Essentially,

what is uncovered is that retaining learners wastes their time, which they could use to pursue other activities after graduating in school, such as employment and further studies. Learners should be progressed instead of their time being wasted on repeating a year of school.

2.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social justice is considered to be relevant theoretical framework for aiding in the challenge of teachers' social status, in securing and promoting their human rights and fair treatment in schools as social places. Schools are regarded as organisations where people work together towards a certain goal. From a sociological perspective, a school is an administrative organisation that embodies various factors and forces (Turkkahraman 2015:384). Forces are represented by teachers and the SMT, who are expected to work in harmony with each other towards the development and education outcomes of the school. The way all the stakeholders relate to each other in schools influences how they maximise production. Teachers can be observed as victorious in the execution of their job descriptions if they feel they are granted their rights, allowed to participate and given equal opportunities at their schools. How a person feels determines their behaviour and attitude, also in the workplace.

Educators have some sort of impact and benefit to the education system. Policies however, are handed down from the government (top-down) and the needs of the teacher are not considered to ensure that effective teaching and learning take place (Adonis 2021:3). Policy decisions are done to educators, not with them. This approach disadvantages both educators and learners, because they are closest to the classroom, and they feel the impact of the policy more than anyone else. The relevance of social justice theory as a framework is exemplified in the following subsections, which formulate what it involves, and explain its historical background, ontology, epistemology, objectives and principles. In this section, elements of social justice theory and its contribution towards distribution of power, justice, fairness and privilege in education will be outlined.

2.6.1 Historical background of social justice theory

The theory of social justice was formulated by philosopher John Rawls in 1971, with the main objective of spreading the word on fairness and justice within the societies people live in. His theory promotes equal basic rights and cooperation in a fair social, political, legal and

economic system. Sabbagh and Schmitt (2016:2) maintain that these systems play a major role in managing the social hurdles between people who are members of a certain society, consequently determining their life chances. The theory is grounded on principles that encourage fairness, participation, equality and the realisation of people's human rights. All these principles advance social cooperation. Social cooperation actualises a better life for all, and better than any would have if each were to live mainly by their own efforts (Rawls 1971:4).

This theory is multifaceted, and it maps different forms of justice, whether distributive, procedural, retributive and restorative. French scholars such as Rawls, Dworkins, Habermas and Mill influenced different perspectives, and their work has been incorporated into the elaboration of the theory. Justice theories are context bound into multiple spheres of education, economics and politics, and the social sphere. This is because people desire to live in societies that are ruled by just administrations and institutions that provide justice at the macro level and provide fair treatment at work (Sabbagh and Schmit 2016:8). The forms of justice are interrelated and each advocates for a socially just society and evaluates ideologies either at work, for families, in politics or education.

The forms of justice hold similar inherent characteristics and hold the position that all humans are equal in fundamental worth or moral status. Distributive justice is concerned with the administration of the law and its outcomes, and it focuses on the socially just allocation of resources, that is, who gets what. Capeheart and Milovanovic (2020:18) explain distributive justice as the association of the community to the person, and equal and proportionate distribution of ordinary goods. Retributive justice is positioned on punishment for wrongdoing. (Kant 1972, cited in Benedict, Schmidt, Spruce and Woodford 2015:14) are of the opinion that this view of justice holds that those who have harmed others deserve punishment that is measured and appropriate to the harm that was done. Retributive justice is mainly based on punishment for wrongdoing and corrective measures for past injustices.

Restorative justice has the aim to restore relationships to righteousness and morality. Where people work together and engage with each other, there is a likelihood of misunderstandings, wrongdoings and misconduct. All of these need to be rectified by uniting the perpetrator and victim in order to restore peace. Normore and Lahera (2017:5) indicate that, as a condition for a restorative process, telling the truth as admission of responsibility by the perpetrator is

necessary in the bid to recognise and seek to address harm done to another. This helps to address the rights of both perpetrators and victims.

In turn, procedural justice is concerned with how people are treated fairly. It concerns the means whereby justice is seen to be done in every aspect of life, in ways that are transparent and understood by everyone (Benedict et al. 2015:14). People need to have an understanding of procedures and laws imposed on them, whether or not they are mandatory. There ought to be a negotiating process instead of a burden of forced resolution. Given the importance of work in people's lives and given how important social relations are at work, this study advocates for social justice, preferably the procedural justice aspect, because it is concerned mainly with fair treatment of people through the processes and procedures applied to people at work, and evokes people's emotions, cognitions and organisational outcomes. These outcomes may indicate how committed people are to cooperate to produce desired outcomes.

2.6.2 Relevance of social justice theory in this study

Social justice was regarded relevant and fitting for this study as it offered a premise that assisted in recognising equity and fairness of treatment in order to achieve social cooperation amongst teachers and other stakeholders of schools and the entire education system. Social cooperation can be attained when all stakeholders of a school act as agents of social justice. Schools, as social places, are obliged to administer fairness, justice and equity. When all teachers, as stakeholders, are treated fairly and given recognition in policies that affect them, their performance levels will increase and reluctance to cooperate will be inhibited. The policy frameworks indicate that teachers require certain levels and kinds of support to give effect to their role (Mogliacci, Raanhuis and Howell 2016:14). Support in this context would promote equity, freedom and fairness. When teachers are unable to negotiate their emotions, and the demands and expectations of others, they become demoralised and experience burn-out (Martin 2015:1). Failure by teachers and learners is caused by teachers being confronted by injustice and inequity. The researcher, therefore, considered the lived realities and social experiences of the situation in which the study was conducted.

Khumalo (2021:49) postulates that the theory of social justice is relevant to the discipline of education, because it relieves all people from unfair and unjust practices. Schools and justice are related. In this study, it was maintained that teachers face a myriad of challenges related to teaching and accommodating progressed learners in classrooms, yet they are not provided

with training to deal with such challenges, nor are they provided with a curriculum that is suitable for progressed learners. This is an unfair practice for both learners and teachers, and it has a lasting impact on teaching and learning. The progression policy comes into conflict with individual liberties and it marginalises teachers. Social justice is achieved in an organisation when individuals or groups are allowed to actively participate in decision-making and their voices are heard (Fraser 2008, in Pearson and Reddy 2021:6). Teachers are not given an opportunity to give their opinions regarding a policy, that seems to be controversial for education stakeholders. They are faced with an unpleasant choice, between applying the curriculum coverage and doing injustice to progressed learners.

Premised on the principle of fairness and justice, social justice, in this study, advocates for teachers to have a central voice in the implementation of the policy. The voices of teachers could assist in criticising the policy, and could assist them and other stakeholders to work collaboratively to create the necessary change. Social justice theory aims to address past injustices, by rectifying the wrongs of mistreatment for excluded and marginalised individuals and social groups (Ambrosio 2016:2). People's rights and democracy have to be realised. Marginalisation happens when an entire group of people is denied meaningful participation in social life and is, thus, potentially vulnerable to deprivation (Nieuwenhuis 2011:200). Teachers are excluded from decision-making or express their opinions regarding the policy, and they are confronted with difficulties they have to endure.

Social justice seems to be diminished by South Africa's current political environment, which imposes undesirable laws on teachers and learners. It does not consider ways to improve the quality of achievement. It is necessary to have common commitment to preventing exploitation and protecting basic rights. Teachers need to engage satisfactorily in all academic issues as stakeholders.

2.6.3 Principles and objectives of social justice theory

In his theory, Rawls explains justice as fairness. He advocates for equal rights to basic liberties in order to assure a morally acceptable society. This section aims to outline the principles and objectives of social justice theory and how they advance education and schools as social organisations. Rawls and Parijs (2003:17) interpret that social justice is concerned with guaranteeing the protection of rights, opportunities and access, and taking care of the least advantaged members of the society. In this case, social justice recommends that teachers

be given the same opportunities and rights as those of other education stakeholders. Teachers are portrayed as the least advantaged compared to other stakeholders, because they are not permitted to raise their grievances, instead, they are mandated to implement a certain policy without expressing their thoughts. In my view as a researcher, everyone should be able to take joy in knowing that their rights as enshrined in the constitution and other international rights standards are observed in social or individual spaces. People are entitled to personal freedom. Rawls (1971:3) describes the concept of social justice theory as follows.

Justice as fairness. Rawls indicates that justice is the cardinal virtue of social institutions. If laws of institutions are unjust, they must be reformed or abolished. Miller (2003:6) says that the cooperation of citizens is needed to make reforms work, so we can say that the theory is proposed as a public doctrine that, ideally, every member of society is supposed to embrace.

Realising human rights. Rawls holds the thought that institutions are fair when they maintain a proper balance regarding determining rights and duties in society. No arbitrary distinctions must be made between people when determining the duties of people or society. Institutions need to encourage a collaborative work environment and enhance social relationships.

Participation. Society should allow everybody to express their concerns without them feeling threatened about participating in decision-making. This liberates a society's thoughts and assists in preventing exploitation in a bid to protect human rights. People need to engage satisfactorily in all decisions that govern their lives. Rawls's central claim is that just people in a society should not suffer disadvantages as a result of circumstances or factors beyond their control (Parvin 2019:13).

Equality. Equality regarding opportunity means people are treated equally, and all people have equal rights (Nieuwenhuis 2011:192). When people feel they are treated equally at workplaces, they relate well to each other and this assists in maximising production, because their social collaboration is enhanced.

2.6.4 Ontology and epistemology of social justice theory

In accord with Creswell and Poth (2018:68), ontology refers to the nature of reality (and what is real) that researchers assume when they conduct inquiries. Ontology involves a description or the science of what exists, and the assumption is that there is one fixed reality.

Understanding of phenomena is built from observation. Herrington (2019:14) asserts that epistemology enquires about knowledge in general – everyone’s knowledge, all knowledge at any time, in any place. This, then, means that epistemology refers to the notion that multiple realities exist, and that these realities can be socially constructed. The multiple realities emancipate the philosophical outlook of the researcher, which suggests that the researcher must be open to realities in order to broaden their view of knowledge. Meaning must be constructed from the interpretations of the participants, and these meanings can be subjective.

Social justice means that participation, fairness and equality as it relates to teachers and learners in the education system are important. It is the responsibility of the researcher to portray social justice for what it really means, by critically and consciously identifying characteristics that deal with fairness.

2.7 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter presented the literature as reported by other scholars and researchers. By doing so, the researcher centred the objectives of the study, explained how the progression policy is implemented in South Africa and other countries, and explained the challenges and effects that this policy presents through its implementation. The literature revealed that teachers despise the policy, and because of that, they exert little effort to ensure that the policy is effective. Teachers are burned out from formulating intervention strategies, keeping up with the pacesetter and dealing with overcrowded classrooms. The chapter also paid attention to the theoretical framework that underpins the study. By explaining social justice, the researcher highlighted the need for teachers to be heard, which is a prerequisite for the implementation of the policy to be successful. The chapter also discussed the objectives of the theory and explained how the theory is relevant to the study. In Chapter 3, the methodological aspects of the study will be explained.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This research study explored the effects the progression policy has on teachers by exploring their perceptions. Their perceptions were explored in order to understand how these perceptions influence their daily practices. This chapter will refer to the methodological aspects of the study, which constitute the research approach, paradigm, design, data generation instruments and procedures, population and sampling techniques and, finally, the ethical considerations. All these aspects are important and necessary for responding to the research questions and sub-questions that guided a thorough comprehension of experiences of teaching progressed learners in primary schools. This chapter will present the research methodology, to elaborate what was briefly discussed in Chapter 1.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As Leavy (2017:16) reveals, methodology refers to a way a research project was undertaken, and how the different elements of a research project were combined into a method that dictated how research proceeded. Methodology is primarily concerned with the arrangement and combination of methods that were used to gather data on a certain phenomenon. Research can use three methodologies to gather data, namely qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. Johnson and Christensen (2014:64) elaborate that quantitative research focuses on trialling theories and assumptions using quantitative data to confirm accuracy. In contrast, qualitative research, as claimed by Tracy (2013:21), has a focus on the thick explanation of context and, normally, its utilisation emerges as problems become evident in the field. Qualitative research focuses on descriptive data rather than numerical data. Mixed methods research involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Morse and Niehaus 2016:2). This usually happens when a researcher wants to respond to a question that cannot be replied to using a single method.

Methodology does not entail only the research procedures, but also involves the rationale backing the selection of the procedures applied (Devi 2017:18). The researcher proposed and opted for a descriptive and interpretive study, which encouraged teachers to narrate their

lived experiences and perceptions towards the progression policy for learners. The following section will focus on the type of methodological approach that assisted the researcher to comprehend the subject matter and interpret it as portrayed by the participants.

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Research is guided by a set of assumptions, and these assumptions or ideologies are known as a paradigm (Killam 2013:5). The key point is that differing theoretical viewpoints provide different types of clarifications of social life (Blaikie and Priest 2018:4). Lin, Oxford and Culham (2016:3) report that the American philosopher Thomas Kuhn conceptualised a paradigm as a broad set of principles and practices that determine the way in which we approach the methodological study of a phenomenon. Paradigms are socially constructed circumstances that reflect how humans engage with inquiry to build and construct knowledge (Lin et al. 2016:3). A research paradigm affirms that reality is constructed in different ways, depending on how someone perceives it. Researchers could use the following paradigms for research: interpretive, post-positivist, pragmatist, participatory and constructivist paradigms.

Based on the above list of paradigms, this study was centred on the interpretive paradigm. Interpretive paradigm recognises multiple realities that are created by the actors themselves (Bartlett and Button 2020:69). The interpretive paradigm permits people to view and understand reality in different and multiple ways that reflect individuals' everyday lives. A researcher who decides to adopt the interpretive paradigm will commence with a belief that, whether or not there is an underlying truth, there is no truth known by the researcher, instead, the researcher provides their own understanding or interpretation of the phenomena under investigation (Ling and Ling 2020:38). It must be understood that these interpretations are subjective and another researcher may have a different interpretation of the content. An interpretive outlook is based on the notion that qualitative research endeavours must consider exposing multiple realities instead of observing a single objective reality (Guest, Namey and Mitchell 2013:6).

As a researcher using the interpretive paradigm, my obligation was to interact socially with the participants in order to build meaningful interpretations from their narrated stories. The researcher put herself into the participants' shoes, and did not limit her role to that of an observer. The researcher did this to get a clear indication of what influences the participants' actions, behaviour, decisions and practices, from their perspectives. The interpretive

paradigm is distinguished by concern for individuals and their subjective opinions. Participants co-participate in knowledge construction. Interpretive researchers agree that the leading course of action is to discover people's understandings, and understanding will be acquired through listening to the people narrate their personal experiences in their desired way, and through their own interpretations (Magnusson and Marecek 2015:2). Both parties and their perceptions are co-creators in the research process (Klenke 2016:23). The comprehension acquired from research is socially constructed from people's interconnection with their social world and elucidation of it, hence the employment of the word interpretivist (Tshabangu, Ba' and Madondo 2020:34).

Teachers' perceptions make up the data of this study, and the statements and observations that teachers connected to their experiences were primary to this research. It is through qualitative research that the phenomenon under study was confronted sufficiently and thoroughly. The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions that teachers have regarding the progression policy, without predicting and generalising based on prior literature reviewed. The intention was to give every participant a chance to narrate their experiences, without the interpretation being limited by the literature.

3.4 RESEARCH APPROACH

Creswell (2014:5) explains a research approach an arrangement or proposal to carry out research; this proposal entails the inclusion of philosophy, research designs and precise methods. In accordance with this explanation, Creswell and Creswell (2018:37) concur that an approach is a set of ideas and direction that stretches the research from wide beliefs to complete methods of collecting, analysing and interpreting data. It is a plan on how a problem will be dealt with, based on the nature of the problem, philosophical assumptions, research design and data collection methods. This study adopted a qualitative research approach to direct the study towards gathering data that would give in-depth insight into the phenomenon under study.

Taylor, Bogdan and Devault (2015:7) state that qualitative research produces detailed data, in this case, people's personal spoken or written connotations and noticeable conduct. This data was gathered by the researcher from the research participants. Leavy (2014:2) asserts that qualitative researchers endeavour to construct incomplete and inspected truths in cooperation with their research participants or through automatic engagement with their research

narratives. Taylor et al. (2015:7) indicate that qualitative researchers are interested in the meaning people connect to things in their lives. Different things may have different meanings for different people. It is only through qualitative research that phenomena can be understood from people's own viewpoints.

Qualitative research is a way of studying social reality (Leavy 2014:5). Qualitative researchers learn about things that happen in the world they live in, and then they construct their own understandings pertaining to what they have discovered. They learn this through people they engage with, in discussions, interviews, observations and analysing documents. Qualitative research is aimed at offering a thorough and clarified comprehension of the social truth or research participants by studying the meaning they construct of their experiences, viewpoints, history, physical and social conditions (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholis and Ormstrong 2014:4).

The researcher, as an educator herself, was able to watch out for unsaid responses based on either participants' behaviour or written documents. She was also in a position to share in the views of the participating teachers, and observed context from the participants' viewpoints. This approach was suitable for the study because it enabled the researcher to explore the participants' emotions, attitudes, appreciation and beliefs, and their impressions about the school progression policy. Data on all these were gathered through stories narrated by the participants.

3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

Leavy (2017:80) discloses that a research design is the procedure of constructing a composition or scheme for a research project. A researcher, therefore, needs to have a detailed plan of action on what they intend to do in regard to data collection that will assist in addressing the research questions. Creswell and Creswell (2018:45) indicate that research designs are categories of inquiry within qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches that offer fixed direction for methods in a research study. Research designs assist researchers by guiding them towards appropriate actions and methods that will enable them to respond to the research question in the most logical manner.

Based on the above descriptions, the researcher decided to base the study within a phenomenological research design to address the phenomenon. The choice of this design was

informed by the nature of the problem to be explored; it permitted the researcher to understand the everyday experiences of the participants while suspending her own preconceived assumptions about the phenomenon. For the purpose of the study, phenomenological research was employed, because it allowed the researcher to collect data from the participants and knowledge from the participants' personal experiences. Phenomenologists focus on describing the mutual experiences of participants regarding a phenomenon, and it outlines the mutual experiences of participants, the habitual definitions for a considerable number of people and their lived experiences of a concept (Creswell and Poth 2018:77).

3.6 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Data collection instruments are confirmed techniques employed to gather data for analysis. Common data collection research instruments include questionnaires, interviews, document analysis, focus groups, tests, language elicitation tasks, corpora and observation (Rose, Baffoe-Djan and McKinley 2019:2). Instruments entail the tools and methods used for collecting data. Data collection instruments used in this study will be discussed below.

3.6.1 Document analysis

Analysing documents was the initial data collection instrument of this particular study. When using documents as a data gathering tool, the concentration is on all types of written correspondence that can elucidate the situation under investigation, regardless of whether the documents are printed or digitally configured (Maree and Nieuwenhuis 2019:101). Document analysis involves a thorough analysis of documents generated by an extensive collection of social practices, with its various forms, from printed information to visible representation (Wharton 2006. cited in Harding 2019:46). However, the researcher needs to verify the legitimacy of the documents. The major convenience of utilising documents is that they are usually accessible and the researcher can save much time on data collection (Harding 2019:46). Going through readily available documents assisted the researcher to save time because there was already much recorded information before she initiated the inquiry. Nonetheless, it must be specified that document analysis is different from analysing literature related to the topic – the two activities are distinct.

In analysing data, the researcher analysed the progression policy itself, which comprises the NPA and NPPPR. The reason for doing so was to examine what the policies prescribe for the teaching and internal assessment processes and procedures for progressed learners at schools. This information was needed to investigate whether teachers implement the policy accordingly. It was mandatory for the researcher to find out whether teachers used the necessary documents and whether they varied their teaching strategies in order to accommodate progressed learners.

3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews

In addition to the document analysis, the semi -structured interview method was employed for collecting data. In this type of interview, the researcher is not obliged to stick to a particular sequence of questions or to structure the questions in a particular way, instead, there is a general plan for the theme to be discussed (Packer 2018:56). The researcher decides on the overarching questions to be asked and there is no particular order to be followed when asking the questions. The questions ought to be open-ended, in order to allow the researcher dissect answers to obtain more clarity. Magnusson and Marecek (2015:25) concur that, in semi-structured interviews, the researcher has a set of topics that they want to learn about from the participants, but the interview format is not restricted to getting specific answers to those questions. The flexible format motivates participants to provide comments, stories and alliances, as well as to propose new topics. The researcher had to interpret what the participants said, thereby building greater understanding, which is a common goal of interpretivist researchers.

Semi-structured interviews create room for deeper investigation and for building on the previously given information. In conversing with interviewees, the researcher has a chance to bring up hearsay or observations, and to request interviewees to confirm, dispute, contend or adjust (Tracy 2013:133). This approach assisted the researcher in acquiring information that might have been omitted from the formal documentation that the researcher had viewed when undertaking document analysis, which was another data collection method that was used. Semi-structured interviews are usually used to confirm data arising from other data sources (Maree and Nieuwenhuis 2019:108).

Another valuable feature of semi-structured interviews is that it is flexible and adjustable. The researcher is at liberty to be spontaneous, and to change and skip questions. The

responses given by participants can guide the researcher to change the order of the questions or rephrase questions, however, the interview content must be concentrate on central issues to the research question, but this type of interrogation permits greater flexibility than a structured interview (Klenke 2016:131).

In this study, the interview questions were open-ended questions, which were designed to investigate the perceptions that teachers have towards the progression policy in primary schools. The researcher conducted interviews with teachers and departmental heads individually. Departmental heads were asked questions that differed from the questions that teachers were asked, because the heads were in managerial positions and they had to oversee the smooth implementation of the policy by the teachers. Teachers were interviewed first, and then departmental heads. There were a total of eight departmental heads and 16 teachers, and they gave time for the interviews that suited their individual timetables.

3.6.3 Focus groups

This study used focus group discussions as another data collection instrument. Focus groups involve discussions among a group of people, to collect qualitative data. Neuman (2014:471) describes focus groups as a special qualitative technique in which people are informally interviewed in a group discussion setting. Provided that the researcher enthusiastically encourages and is attentive to the intercommunication, any group conversation may be labelled a focus group (Kritzinger and Barbour 1999, cited by Flick 2018:2). Flick (2018:2) articulates that motivating group intercommunications enthusiastically relates to concerns about facilitating the focus group discussion, and ensuring that participants converse among themselves rather than collaborating solely with the researcher. The researcher must, however, prepare questions that encourage interaction and varied responses, in order to stimulate discussion and enable further probing.

Focus groups are often used to survey multiple individual opinions concurrently (Cyr 2019:3). This helps to save time for both the participants and researcher. The group focuses on a mutual exercise, which assists the researcher to generate rich data, common themes and solutions. Participants may query one another and explain answers to one another (Neuman 2014:472). This creates more platforms for continued discussions and elaborations. Although it is the researcher who selects the topic and guides the discussion, it is the group members who generate data through their discussion of the topic – it is the researcher's focus but the

participants' group. In this study, interviewing multiple candidates at the same time assisted the researcher to see whether the teachers and departmental heads worked together in implementing the policy. The researcher was also able to explore shared experiences and identities of teachers and departmental heads.

There are multiple advantages to using focus groups. This method is considered to be successful in broadening differing responses, actualises rejected and neglected information and also breaks down the reluctance that may demoralise participants and prevent them from divulging information (Maree and Nieuwenhuis 2019:110). The discussion between participants offers the researcher a chance to gather information on affairs that may not arise from their interaction with the researchers alone (Liamputtong 2011:4). Focus groups also encourage antisocial participants to give their opinions by building on other participants' comments and ideas (Liamputtong 2011:4).

The focus group method is necessary for examining what, how and why people believe, the way they do their matters without pressurising them into hasty decisions (Liamputtong 2011:5). It assists the researcher to explore participants' diverse viewpoints and a wide range of perspectives on how people view a phenomenon, and how they interact with it.

Focus groups have advantages, which compelled the researcher to employ it in this study, though there are also disadvantages involved. Bajpai (2011:29) asserts that participants who can talk and express themselves well can divert the real findings of the group, and one or two individuals who dominate the conversation can distract the discussion; the information they give is therefore regarded as conclusive and representative of the entire group's opinions. This situation may intimidate other group members and make them feel inferior and nervous. Another disadvantage is that the group discussion may get off topic when participants begin to talk amongst themselves or relate stories that do not relate to the issue at hand (Leslie 2016:58). This may also divert the participants from discussing the researcher's proposed idea. This wastes time and the researcher has to get them back on track.

Getting people together at the same time might also be a challenge, because people operate on different time schedules and are in different places. Another problem could be that of transcribing interviews. Focus group interviews are often recorded, because it would take a lot of time for the researcher to note down each person's comment. Some people may object to having their voices recorded (Leslie 2016:58).

In collecting data for this study, focus group discussions followed the semi-structured interviews. Teachers and departmental heads were combined in a group to discuss totally new questions, different from the ones that were asked during individual interviews. This assisted in getting additional information that may have been forgotten during individual interviews; also, new thinking amongst participants was triggered, leading to lengthy, insightful discussions.

3.7 RESEARCH SITE

Data was collected at four public schools in Ladybrand, Manyatseng Township, Circuit 11, Motheo district. The schools were purposively selected because of their geographic location, learner enrolment and status. The schools are located in close proximity to the researcher's workplace, with one of the schools being the researcher's workplace. This location reduced traveling costs and time restraints, as it was easy to travel to the participants. The fact that all these schools are public entities, means they operate on a similar scale and follow identical prescribed DBE policies. These schools vary slightly in learner enrolment, though the advantage here was that they are all public schools, which meant that had a significantly higher enrolment than private schools. This widened the sample because the greater the number of learners, the greater the number of teachers and departmental heads.

3.8 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

This study investigated the perceptions that teachers have about the progression policy in primary schools. Regarding the population of the study, the researcher wanted to obtain data from teachers in primary schools in the Motheo district. The study population is the total group of sections from which a sample is actually derived (Leavy 2017:76).

3.9 SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

Leavy (2017:76) reports that sampling is a procedure where a number of cases is derived from a greater population. It is number of individual cases which is a representation of the entire population. The selected individual cases make inferences on behalf of the entire population. It is, therefore, imperative to choose a sample for a study wisely. The sample of this study was selected purposively. Purposive sampling, according to Pandey and Pandey

(2015:54), means participants are selected according to some arbitrary method, because they are known to be representative of the total population, or it is known that they will produce well matched groups. The advantage of this type of sampling, in the opinion of Pandey and Pandey (2015:54), is that data of sample groups can be matched easily, making it simple for the researcher to analyse their data.

In selecting and grouping the study's sample, the researcher deliberately collected data from four teachers at each school. From these four teachers, two teachers represented the foundation phase, and two the intermediate and senior phase (inter-sen phase) at each school, bringing the total number of teachers to 16 for all the schools. Two departmental heads at each school were also selected, one from the foundation phase and another from the intermediate and senior phase. The total number of departmental heads was eight from the four schools, bringing the total number of participants to 24. Departmental heads are teachers too, who have been mandated to empower, train and monitor other teachers into productivity. They too have their own teaching allocation at schools. Separating the interviews of teachers and departmental heads assisted in giving the researcher a vivid insight into the observations of teachers, because an equal number of representatives were selected from both phases and groups, even though the majority of teachers were women. Teachers who were recruited from the population were expected to have at least three years' experience of teaching, to ensure that they had sufficient experience in teaching progressed learners. Information about their experience was gathered from their portfolios.

3.10 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Data was collected for a period of three months. The researcher initially analysed the policy documents before interviewing the participants. The participants gave the researcher a time that suited their individual schedules. The researcher met the teachers and departmental heads at least thrice a week for interviews and focus group discussions. All these activities were done after school hours, in order not to interrupt teaching and learning.

The researcher started off by explaining to participants what the study entailed and how their responses would contribute to the study. The researcher explained to them that their confidentiality and anonymity would be protected. The participants then filled in consent forms to acknowledge that they would be participating in the study voluntarily. The researcher and the participants held interviews and discussions in private spaces, free from

interruption. The researcher facilitated all discussions and guided them so that conversations did not spiral out of control, especially group discussions. All responses were recorded for later analysis by the researcher.

3.11 PILOT STUDY

In attempting to familiarise the researcher with the data collection technique and to estimate the time the researcher would need to complete each interview and focus group discussion, the researcher tested the data collection instruments prior to the main research study at one school in the district, which did not form part of the research sample, but which also implemented the progression policy. The researcher conducted this pilot study to discover whether the research instruments were sensible and adequate, and not vague. It was at this juncture the researcher was able to recognise what could be unfavourable to the study.

3.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before commencing any form of research, a researcher needs to observe ethical considerations. Ethics is the branch of philosophy that addresses matters regarding morality, and the terms ethics and morality are often used interchangeably (Wiles 2013:4). In social research, humans need to be protected from harm, as does the environment and surroundings involved in the study. Ill treatment and misuse of participants must be avoided, and the study's nature and how the findings will be used, must be revealed (Leavy 2014:5). Ethical considerations are basically deliberations and reflections on the noble regulations, values, principles and procedures to follow before conducting research. They guide the behaviour and responsibilities of both the researcher and participants. A researcher needs to consider the following ethical concerns.

3.12.1 Permission to conduct research

Permission refers to seeking or authorising consent to do a particular thing. A research study cannot commence without submission and approval of a request to conduct such research from the ethics committee of the institution where the researcher is enrolled (Maree 2019:48). This is done to ensure that the researcher follows all the necessary ethical procedures in order to protect the rights of all participants with all respect and consideration.

Once permission had been given by the university involved, in this case the University of the Free State, the researcher requested permission from the DBE and the district circuit office. The researcher also asked for permission from the principals of the four schools. Lastly, the researcher obtained consent from the participants. All ethical guidelines stipulated by the ethics committee were adhered to during data collection and presentation.

3.12.2 Informed consent and right to participate

Informed consent involves providing participants with clear information about what participating in a research project will involve and giving them the opportunity to decide whether or not they want to participate (Wiles 2013:6). Participants were furnished with a consent form that sought their consent to participate in the study; the form defined the nature of the project and, by signing the form, they pledged their participation in the research project. They were also informed that participation is not mandatory but voluntary. The participants were also cautioned that they could withdraw from the study if need arises, without penalty or being prejudiced.

3.12.3 Confidentiality, non-identification and non-traceability

The participants' privacy and confidentiality was respected. Maree (2019:48) expounds that participants need to be assured that their responses would always be considered as extremely confidential and that they would not be made available to unauthorised users. The researcher promised to maintain this stipulation. No participant is identified by name in the study, instead, pseudonyms are used, and privacy was maintained during interviews, although the researcher alerted participants that privacy may be violated in group discussions because there were multiple participants. The audio-recorded and transcribed interviews are stored in the supervisor's office where the information is kept safely in a locked cabinet.

3.12.4 Harm

Research ethics require that harm should be avoided entirely (Leavy 2014:63). Harm could take any form, ranging from physical injury and psychological damage. It was my responsibility as a researcher to prevent any form of harm to the participants. The researcher

did not use any disrespectful and derogatory words that shamed the participants. The researcher maintained peace and harmony throughout the interaction sessions.

3.13 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers and departmental heads separately. Following the interviews, focus group discussions among the participants were conducted. The researcher analysed documents, which are the NPA and NPPPR policies, that form the progression policy, in order to check for consistencies in what the teachers had narrated and what the policy actually prescribes. The data was collected using audio recordings and these recordings were later transcribed by the researcher. The researcher transcribed the data and made sense of the information provided by the participants (Creswell 2012:11). The transcribed data were later coded and organised into themes that would assist in making the data more comprehensible. Data from the documents were analysed and presented according to the stipulations of the individual policies.

As maintained by Creswell and Poth (2018:225), data analysis entails analysing text, organising the data, administering an introductory examination of the data base, creating themes out of coded data, and presenting and interpreting it. Data analysis entails the process of arranging collected data into classifications for better comprehension. Comments from participants were organised under common themes, phrases and patterns that integrated the raw data into useful and easily comprehensible information. Flick (2014:4) defines qualitative data analysis as the categorisation and explanation of lingual or visible material, that form affirmations about the inferred extent of meaning making about the matter and what it presents, in this case, subjective and social meanings. A requirement of data analysis is to reduce the capacity or complication of data, or to enlarge the actual material by writing down interpretations of new text (Flick 2014:2).

For the purpose of the study, content analysis was considered viable for data analysis. It was convenient for checking similarities and variations in information provided by participants. Content analysis is described by Bernard, Wutich and Ryan (2017:243) as combined techniques for methodologically encoding and analysing qualitative data. These methods are used across social sciences to explore explicit and covert meanings. Information gathered from participants may be straight forward or complex. The researcher has to identify patterns in the data that were gathered, and corroborate it inductively into themes. The researcher

interpreted the various perspectives of participants in a coherent manner, by compiling information into similarities and differences. Content analysis is, therefore, a functional method that permits researchers to determine and explain context, people, actions, events and places (Maree and Nieuwenhuis 2019:5).

The application of unique, relevant techniques for generating data should be sensitive to the social circumstances of the study, and can be modified for each participant or occasion, to permit investigation of emerging matters (Ritchie et al. 2014:4). It is important to select a data collection instrument that suits qualitative data collection and analysis. Types of instruments selected for collection do not need to limit the potential of extensive data collection. Qualitative studies require purely interactional and linguistic data collection instruments that allow participants to give their opinions freely and enable researchers to probe where necessary. This approach, therefore, resulted in accurate data collection.

3.14 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The focus of this chapter was to present an explanation for the methodological aspect of the study. The chapter discussed motivations for selecting the particular methodologies. In this chapter, the data collection instruments, sample, and research site were discussed. The ethical considerations were also elaborated on. The researcher concluded the chapter by explaining how data analysis was undertaken. The next two chapters focus on reporting the data that were collected in relation to achieving the aim of the study, which was to explore the perceptions of teachers on the progression policy in primary schools in the Motheo district. Chapter 4 will foreground the data analysis, present the data and discuss the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter was preceded by an outline of the study design and methodology that was applied. The focal point of this chapter is to disclose and analyse the findings of the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis that were conducted to respond to the main research question: *What are the perceptions of teachers towards the implementation of the progression policy in primary schools?* The qualitative data that was collected from 24 participants, comprising eight departmental heads, and four teachers from each of four public schools located in the Manyatseng Township, was thematically analysed. Data that were transcribed and organised will be presented in this chapter. Also, empirical data will be presented to confirm or disprove what the literature portrays.

For the goal of the study and to observe ethical considerations, that is, to protect the identification of the participants and schools, the researcher designated codes for the schools, namely, School A to D. Teachers from school A are named as AT1 (School A Teacher 1), AT2 (School A Teacher 2), AT3 (School A Teacher 3) and AT4 (School A Teacher 4) and the departmental heads as DH1 and DH2 in all the schools, because only two departmental heads were conducted per school. For the protection of participants, it is vital that the researcher obscures participants' names and avoids inclusion of identifiable information on the analysis (Creswell and Poth 2018:227). It was through a qualitative approach that the researcher managed to gather an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions in their different contexts, and meanings in those contexts. Table 4.1 provides a summary of schools, participants and codes allocated to each school.

Table 4.1: Schools, participants and codes allocated

School	Departmental heads	Teachers
School A	DH1 and DH2	AT1–4
School B	DH1 and DH2	BT1–4
School C	DH1 and DH2	CT1–4
School D	DH1 and DH2	DT1–4
Participants	8	16

The data in Table 4.1 indicate that participants were all teachers, including members of the SMTs through their departmental heads. For the purpose of the study, A, B, C, D and T1–4 represent the teachers in chronological order; the alphabetical represent the schools. Data were collected successfully and, following its collection, the researcher analysed it inductively. The researcher transcribed the data and made sense of the information provided by the participants (Creswell 2012:11). Analysis entails the dismantling of data, to dictate and regulate the responses that were furnished by individuals. Then, the data conglomerated with the intention of summarising it (Creswell 2012:12).

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS

For this study, the researcher employed semi-structured interviews, and allocated an hour for each participant and two hours per focus group discussion. The interviews and discussions took roughly the estimated times, because of the approximation the researcher got from the pilot study. Each participant proposed a time after school hours that suited their individual time schedules. The researcher asked questions and recorded the responses as each participant was speaking. An audio recorder was used. The researcher did this to capture all the participants' responses, so that the information could be used during the transcription and analysis process. The participants were given sufficient time to respond to the questions, to remember all details or information they might want to include, and to ask the researcher to repeat questions in case they missed it. Participants were at liberty to respond to the questions in either English or their home language, which was Sesotho for all of them. The researcher

translated the Sesotho responses into English, without misrepresenting the participants, and will present extracts from the responses verbatim.

After collecting data, the researcher listened to the recorded responses in order to familiarise themselves with the data before it was transcribed. After listening to the audio recordings, the researcher sorted and transcribed the data simultaneously. The researcher read the transcriptions thoroughly and frequently to gain a deeper meaning of the data and its relationships, and identified patterns and formed subthemes. Leavy (2017:150) terms this process as initial immersion, during which the researcher feels the pulse of the data, develop initial ideas, reduce the data and gets a sense of the data as a whole before beginning a systematic analysis process. As the researcher developed initial ideas and feelings gathered from the data; notes were jotted down. This process, according to Kenneavy, Harnois, Atkinson and Korgen (2022:304), is referred to as memoing. They explain that memoing is the practice of writing reflective notes or a memo about what the researcher is learning from the data. Memoing assists in tracking the development of ideas through the analysis process, and tracks the progress of code and theme development (Creswell and Poth 2018:233).

Neuman (2014:478) suggests that the researcher needs to examine patterns of similarities and differences across cases and attempt to come to terms with their diversity. The researcher looked for similar responses and patterns from all participants, who had responded to the same question, and colour coded these consistencies. The similar responses were grouped together to form subthemes. The researcher eventually exported the information on particular themes and subthemes into separate Word documents. This was done to make data more controllable, by reducing the volume of raw data to major and dominant patterns, to create a meaningful and comprehensible structure that could be analysed to respond to the research questions. The idea was to reduce data and sort it into various themes (O'Leary 2019:608).

The themes and subthemes are presented in Table 4.2. The researcher separated the data into identifiable sections that represent responses gathered in interviews and focus group discussions. The data analysis was combined and reflected back to what has been stated in the literature. The simultaneous engagement with the text and existing literature permitted the researcher to construct greater understanding and link it to what the literature states (O'Leary 2019:613). Data from documents are represented in the next sections.

4.3 PRESENTATION OF DATA, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Guided by the research questions and feedback from the participants in interviews and focus group discussions, the following themes and subthemes emanated from coded data.

Table 4.2: Themes and subthemes

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Trainings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circulars • Own discretion Baseline assessment
Implementation challenges teachers experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor literacy skills • Parental involvement Time allocation and learner numbers
Protocols to deal with challenges	Referrals SBST
Teacher's strategies in assisting progressed learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remediation time One-size-fits-all-approach
Teachers' perceptions of the policy and its effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease in dropout rates • Deteriorating education standard • Behavioural problems • Delays in curriculum coverage and workload Demotivation and loss of interest
Stipulations of the policy, role of the school and teachers and monitoring of the implementation of the policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and follow-up of implementation

Below, the researcher will discuss the six themes that emerged in this study.

4.4 THEME 1: TRAINING

This particular theme emerged from the first question, which interrogates whether teachers were trained on the implementation of the progression policy. The question was asked as a means to gather facts on whether the teachers were aware of the importance of the policy, how they can implement it effectively and what expectations they had in that regard. Departmental heads were also questioned in their interviews whether the school SMT conducts training for teachers regarding the implementation of the policy. In the empirical investigation, teachers and departmental heads concurred that, before any policy can be implemented, stakeholders or those expected to effectively implement the policy must be offered necessary training. Often such training opportunities are offered by the DBE, through their specialist officials or expert agencies. Few teachers in this circuit seemed to have received any training on how to implement the policy; they had not been offered any mitigation strategies to employ as and when necessary. The following section will analyse the responses given by teachers and departmental heads with regard to training for implementing the policy.

4.4.1 Circulars

A circular is a written statement that provides information and guidelines on laws and procedures for a workplace. The DBE usually communicates information on laws and any other announcements through circulars to schools. The school principal then issues the circulars to teachers through their respective departmental heads. The participants indicated that formal training was not conducted, instead, they received circulars through their departmental heads instructing them to implement the policy, and when the policy must be implemented. The participants disclosed that all teachers and SMTs admit that training is important for development, and they undertook to attend all training events scheduled for them. In addressing this matter, participants from School A and B responded by saying,

“We were not trained, we were only given a circular informing us about how learners are progressed at the end of the year, that they are progressed by their age cohort and number of years in a phase. It is very crucial that the department trains us, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19 where a lot of learning time was lost and all

learners were progressed and promoted even if they are in the appropriate age group or were in the grade for the first time” (AT1).

“We were not trained, but we only received a circular informing us that every year end, learners must be progressed and the entire process entailing promotion, retention and progression were highlighted. I do not remember going to a workshop, honestly” (BT2).

“I am not sure whether I can say we were trained. Last year, the District Based Support Team came to monitor our work. They shared some tips on how we can support learners who seem to have major problems in reading and writing because these are the last milestones before listening and speaking that a learner must reach in order to be an efficient communicator” (AT3).

4.4.2 Own discretion

Curriculum policies need to include resources and guidance that expand on formal, teaching and assessment strategies, to give clarity, pedagogic guidance and means to curriculum specifications (Brown and Penny 2017:11). The progression policy is not explicit on the pedagogic and assessment strategy support that teachers need to offer for every struggling learner, especially progressed learners. Teachers use their own discretion on teaching and assessment strategies, because the progression policy does not indicate how and when that support should be given and by whom, often leading to negligence and misinterpretation on the part of the teachers in policy implementation (Munje & Maarman 2016:194). Participants indicated that they had not received any form of training pertaining to teaching progressed learners. They said they use their own discretion on teaching progressed learners. They teach and assess according to their own judgement – what they think is best for them and the learners. Teacher training regarding implementation of the policy is vital, because training can provide them with prescripts for the policy, and suggest strategies that can enhance their teaching to accommodate learners with a variety of needs. BT4 indicated that,

“We have not been trained at all since the inception of the policy. We have always used our own discretions on how we can balance the progressed and promoted learners. We design our own lesson plans according to how we have been orientated for CAPS, not specifically to accommodate progressed learners” (BT4).

DT2 confirmed the above by stating,

“No trainings or workshops have been conducted on how we can teach these learners, we just teach them in the same way as other learners or use our discretion in extreme cases where we see that a year is about to end and a learner does not show any significant improvement” (DT2).

There were also complaints that, even though training is not offered, teachers are expected to fill in forms that refer learners to special schools. DT3, AT2 and CT1 expressed the views that the procedure they are expected to conform to drains them of energy and demands extra time from them, so they avoid engaging in that process.

DT3 agreed with this notion and said;

“Trainings are not conducted at all. We were only instructed by our SMT that we must do referrals in a case where a learner needs special support such as autism and blindness. The management does not want learner enrolment to drop, we only refer in extreme cases and this hinders other learners who need special intervention to transform and it means I as a teacher must modify my content from that of regular students, I do not have time, honestly” (DT3).

“I remember our head of department issuing a circular on referring learners, it was not explicit on the entire process of referring a learner. I cannot say I was trained too because there was little said about the process, so I am still clueless” (DT4).

4.4.3 Baseline assessment

When learners enter a new setting, at the beginning of the year or term, their development, attainment and prior knowledge are evaluated in order to understand their needs and to obtain information on their aptitude and potential for learning. It is normally done through oral or informal assessments. BT4 claimed that training has been offered, and she said,

“Yes, we have been offered training when COVID-19 started. That was when we were told that it is mandatory that all learners must be progressed and promoted from Grades 1 to 3 because they have lost a lot of learning time because of long school break due to the pandemic. We have attended training through our LF’s (learning facilitator) and they instructed us to do baseline assessment at the beginning of the year in order to check for

learners' prior knowledge, only then we can know how far progressed and retained learners' academic development and content are, only then we can reflect them back on last grade's content or move on with them together with the promoted learners" (BT4).

Responses given by DH1 from School B concurred that training events have been presented. She voiced,

"Not only did the Department offer training, we as departmental heads also offered them training on how to teach progressed learners. That was when we were guiding them through the school based support team learner transfer process. We even asked them to have remediation in place for struggling learners. The best way to do that is to conduct baseline assessment so that they do not have to repeat content unnecessarily. Not all learners fail the same thing" (DH1 School B).

Other departmental heads indicated that it is necessary for training to be offered regularly. They advised as follows:

"The Department of Education needs to do thorough training regarding teaching these progressed learners. The inclusive education learning facilitators come or offer trainings once every two years, which is not enough. What happens to the newly appointed teachers regarding teaching these learners? They still lack expertise and therefore require training" (DH1, School C).

"A well-planned training, at least every term, is required, especially on numeracy and literacy. If those aspects can be covered sufficiently in teacher trainings, we will have very low numbers of learners being progressed" (DH2, School C).

"It is during trainings where the Department of Education can have insight on the challenges teachers face during implementation of the policy. Learning facilitators can advise teachers in a positive way on how to resolve those challenges. The teachers expect us to assist in resolving their learners' challenges and we too have never been given training" (DH2, School D).

From these verbatim quotes and subthemes, it is evident that training on the implementation of the policy is not conducted successfully and, according to the data, only one school in the township received training. Teachers with long service histories probably still use vintage methods of teaching. They are not acquainted with the latest and far-reaching developments

in teaching struggling learners. Ramputla (2020:24) specifies that teachers are not offered training on how to best implement policies, but they are expected to offer support to learners on every policy that is designated to them. A good teacher needs to be renewed to remain alive and innovative, especially in the evolving technological world. Most participants shared the view that they were not offered training, therefore, their support of progressed learners was inadequate.

4.5 THEME 2: IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES TEACHERS EXPERIENCE

The participants were asked in the semi-structured interviews for teachers: *Do you experience any challenges with the implementation of the policy?* In the focus group discussions, participants were asked, *What breakthrough/challenges have you faced with the policy implementation and what are your opinions in this regard?*

As reported by Ramabulana (2017:54), teachers, who are the forces of executing transition, encounter constant confrontations related to controlling and directing curriculum change, policy implementation and teaching and learning in the classroom. These challenges sometimes hinder or slow down their production. The following subthemes emerged from the theme of implementation challenges: poor literacy skills, parental involvement, time allocation and learner numbers.

4.5.1 Poor literacy skills

This subtheme relates to the ability of a learner to read and write eloquently at the level of the grade the learner is in. A learner has to be in a position to communicate and read clearly. Reading and writing skills are required, so that learners are skilled in a certain content area (Lapp, Flood and Farnan 2015:1). Literacy skills are considered to be low when an individual is not able to read, write, speak or function at a necessary grade level. Low skills hinder teaching and learning, because these are basic skills one needs to function effectively as an individual.

The findings indicate that teachers are confronted by illiterate learners, and some learners cannot communicate effectively and clearly because they lack reading and writing skills. Also, learners are unable to seek information in a written text and make meaning out of it. Learners ultimately become frustrated when they do not do well in standardised tests, which

leads to truancy, dropping out and other negative reactions. This is in line with the literature quoted in Section 2.2.3, where the HSRC (2016) is quoted as saying that learners with low literacy skills must not be progressed, as these learners demotivate teachers, because they are not grade ready, and their literacy levels are not at the level they are supposed to be. In a focus group discussion at School A, it was gathered from AT1, AT2 and DH2 that progressed learners could do much better if they had been, at least, held back for a year. AT3 said,

“Some learners have basic problems of reading and writing. They cannot read or even write their names. This means a learner cannot read a question and respond to it independently. In that manner, they fail all reading and writing subjects” (AT3).

In School B, DH2 disagreed;

“Teachers do not use the time allocated on time tables for reading effectively. There is a slot on the time-table that indicates when it is time for DAR (Drop All and Read), this time is deliberately included to drill learners in reading and writing when there is a chance” (DH2, School B).

“One of the dominant challenges about progressed learners is that majority of them are not able to read and write, some are able to write when copying from the chalkboard but coining and constructing words on their own is a problem” (CT3).

In a focus group discussion at School B, DH1 repudiated teachers’ negative views on illiterate learners by saying,

“Teachers do not regularly expose learners to literacy activities such as reading big books, story books and phonics writing in order to enable them to construct words and sentences” (DH1, School B).

In a focus group discussion at School C, most responses revealed that participants also faced challenges related to illiterate learners, which does not only impact these learners’ academic lives, but also their social and future economic lives.

“Students who struggle with literacy feel excluded from academics and the disadvantage of it goes beyond the school years. Nobody will want to employ an illiterate. Failure to secure a job will lead into a person fending themselves through theft and criminal activities. I worry a lot about them” (CT2).

“I have discovered that when learners are illiterate, their confidence becomes low and their reading culture is not enhanced. It is even worse in English, they struggle more than they do in their own language” (CT4).

“There are a lot of challenges with these kinds of learners, especially when it comes to writing; they do not space letters and words correctly, they write phonetically and ignore spelling rules, they make spelling errors due to difficulties with letter – sound relations. Simply put, their writing skills are poor and it is just a lot to deal with as a teacher” (DH1, School C).

The above perspective coincides with the literature, which reports that, even if the learner is fortunate and completes Grade 12, their minimal level of literacy and low career maturity will remain a challenge, since this maturity is required for informed and concise career decisions for their futures (Grossen et al. 2017:8). Brahmabhatt (2020:14) elaborates that the majority of South African learners cannot read, write and comprehend at the level that is appropriate for their grade and age. Reading and writing are the most common forms of communication, and need to be perfected.

4.5.2 Parental involvement

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, section 3 (1) dispenses provision for parental involvement. It states that parents have an obligation to bring their children to school from the first school day of an academic year when such a learner reaches age seven, until the last school day of the year when such a learner reaches age 15 or Grade 9 (DBE 1996). This means that education is mandatory from ages seven to 15, Grade 1 to 9 and, until then, a parent must be fully involved in their children’s education – socially, economically and otherwise.

Parental involvement is necessary for accomplishing and expediting quality teaching and learning, therefore, teachers, parents and the SMT need to work collaboratively to make education a success. Research indicates that there is a continuous decline in parental involvement in schools (Sesinyi 2020:1). If the decline prevails, it becomes inevitable that education quality declines. In the case of progressed learners, it is worse when parents are less involved or not involved at all, because these learners are already experiencing challenges that hinder them from excelling at school.

Teachers and departmental heads specified that they normally engaged with parents when necessary, they informed them through writing letters, sending messages through teacher–parent Whatsapp groups, and held discussions in face-to-face term meetings and at teacher–parent evenings. Some parents show an interest in their children’s schooling, while some do not. It was indicated by teachers that some parents felt that their education background was insufficient to assist their children with school activities such as homework.

“Parents do not support us at all. When we give homework, they do not assist learners at home. We have even asked them to sign the homework as acknowledgement that they have assisted the learner, they do not comply. These progressed learners are even stubborn and truant classes, parents respond negatively when we inform them of such incidences” (BT2).

“Parents usually do not assist the learners with homework. I remember another parent informing me that the homework was difficult and she could not assist the learner because of the complexity of the work. I have realised that some of them are not adequately educated to assist in some subjects” (BT4).

“We have phase meetings every term with parents and teacher-parent evenings. This is where we discuss challenges that we stumble upon regarding teaching these learners, as a way of seeking parental intervention. We hold parent-teacher evenings where we discuss learners’ progress and challenge. This is not done now during COVID-19 because of observation protocols. Parents still do not make any effort to correct and come up with solutions” (CT3).

“Parents indicate that they do not have time to come to school because of their work commitments when invited to meetings. The SMT normally schedules parents meetings or parent-teacher evenings for 17:00, but often parents do not even form a quorum. They simply do not care about their children’s education” (CT4).

“Parents never bother to make a follow up on learners’ performance. The only time they are able to come to school is when there are disputes either between learners, parents and teachers. I do not even know most of my learners’ parents because they have never come to school to get clarity or phone call on their child’s performance” (AT1 and AT2).

“I often see parents sending representatives to school during meetings, other parents do not have smart phones and use their neighbours’ or friends’ for Whatsapp groups. So it becomes a matter of whether messages are relayed successfully” (DT4).

Departmental heads shared similar opinions and confirmed that teachers try to engage parents, but there is reluctance on the side of parents to become involved. There could be multiple reasons for this reluctance, but it is the responsibility of a parent to timeously inform a teacher if there is hindrance regarding engagement. Participants shared the following thoughts:

“Our school does not have a proper parental involvement policy in place to guide the process, so it becomes difficult for involvement to be effective” (DH2, School A).

“There are too many child-headed families and, in this case, the learner is on its own. Some learners are guided by sick and elderly grandparents. Nobody assists in anything at or from home” (DH2, School B).

“Some parents feel inferior because of their low level of education, therefore they do not assist in homeworks. I usually encourage learners to ask their parents that they find them tutors, not only to assist with homework, but to also bring them up to speed with the curriculum and other learners” (DH1, School C).

“Another barrier is parents’ negative attitude and limited education. Parents often display negative attitude in being involved and they feel inferior participating in the learner’s homework or assignments because of their low academic qualifications” (DH1, School D).

These barriers shared by departmental heads and teacher’s opinions correlate with the literature, that general academic performance, classroom practices, anticipated learner behaviour and school attendance are compromised as a result of deteriorating parental involvement. Moagi (2020:202) reports that parents who do not participate in their children’s academics are often oblivious of challenges confronting their children and learners, and are unaware that their children are susceptible to failure because of issues like absenteeism and boycotting classes. Parental involvement positively affects the academic achievement of minor children, as well as facilitating better grades, higher test scores, regular school

attendance, better social skills, improved behaviour and positive attitude towards school (Jeynes 2003:202).

4.5.3 Time allocation and learner numbers

The time allocated to a teacher per subject or learning area is meant for them to conduct their lesson as per the lesson plan. Often, a lesson takes 40 minutes and, during those minutes, assessment is done by a teacher to verify whether the lesson objectives had been achieved. This means all learners must be reached and given the necessary attention during that time. In overcrowded classrooms, it becomes almost impossible to connect with all learners, especially those that need further and personal attention.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the school attendance timetable was altered to a rotational system, and learners attended school on a one-day platooning or weekly rotation system in order to observe COVID-19 regulations, such as social distancing. Learners were placed on different attendance timetables. This led to different views amongst teachers, some felt it was an opportunity for them to drill retained and progressed learners, while other teachers felt it had many disadvantages, such as learners failing to abide by their specified attendance timetables. In weighing in on the matter, AT1 indicated that,

“A period is 30 minutes, and sometimes I have to focus more on the progressed learners and this means I ignore the intelligent learners. Sometimes I move on with the intelligent and ignore progressed learners because I want to move quickly” (AT1).

“The main challenge now is the timetable that we are following. There is not enough time under the COVID-19 circumstances. We follow a platooning timetable model, where learners alternate by hours, so it is exhausting and there is less time for teaching” (AT3).

Most teachers at all the schools agreed that the time allocated for lessons is insufficient, because many learners need special attention, and most of the classrooms are overcrowded. So, the main issue is that the teachers have to move on with the pacesetter in order for curriculum coverage to be satisfactory. As difficult as it is to keep the school functioning normally, even under these conditions, the SMT needs to constantly encourage and support teachers. CT2 said,

“I have a lot of learners in my class and I cannot reach all of them. I deal with discipline issues, especially from these failing learners” (CT2).

During focus group discussions at School C, CT4 indicated that,

“Because of large learner numbers, I cannot reach all learners at the same time. When I engage more with progressed learners, the idling learners become passive and start to disturb the entire class. Because of the daily rotation that we are in, progressed learners tend to forget content more ” (CT4).

At School A, AT2 and AT1 indicated that, with large classes, the disadvantage is that lessons are almost always disturbed because there are too many learners to manage. At School A, most teachers in the focus group indicated that, with large classes, they are unable to engage learners in group discussions. They indicated that it is difficult for teachers to work with learners in classes of more than 40 learners.

“Struggling students fall further behind because of the minimal attention I give. I am unable to move around in class freely, this means I cannot fully monitor their learning” (AT3).

“The second term is nearing completion and I still do not know some learners’ names because there is a lot of them to memorise. I only know names of those who are active in class and the most struggling learners. Their sitting arrangement frustrates me too because I do not know how to pair them” (AT4).

“The issue of class size has only been considered now by the department during COVID-19, especially considering that schools have been closed for a longer duration. Teaching and learning became effective at this time because we were able to give support to learners individually” (BT3).

“Because of the considerable volume of curriculum coverage and huge number of learners in classrooms, offering these learners with individualised support and attention is almost impossible” (DT2).

Class sizes at these schools were observed to be large, and, as a consequence, effective teaching and learning were disturbed. The unmanageability of classes makes it unworkable for educators to provide quality teaching to learners, because the increase in the number of learners does not correlate with resource availability (Nkosi & Adebayo 2021:201).

4.6 THEME 3: PROTOCOLS TO DEAL WITH CHALLENGES

Teachers indicated a number of challenges they are confronted with at schools that hinder their potential to assist progressed learners and make the implementation of the policy a success. The following subsections will refer to procedures that must be followed as a way of assisting learners who have been caught up in the progression entanglement. Departmental heads were asked, *What protocols do you have in place for dealing with challenges experienced by teachers?*

4.6.1 Referrals

When learners face any form of obstacle and need special education, they are referred to special schools. Their current schools issue referral letters to a special school. This decision is often reached by the teacher, a parent or the child's legal guardian. What becomes a challenge for teachers in referring learners who seem to have special needs, is the procedure that needs to be followed. It commences with a great deal of documentation, before getting parent permission and testing the learner. This procedure discourages most teachers from seeking referrals for learners. Teachers need to provide evidence that they have tried every possible avenue and have used all the resources available, and must refer to individual and medical support in cases where the learner's condition is medical, though the latter is often done by parents. In addition, teachers need to complete learner profiles, Support Needs Assessment (SNA) forms 1 and 2. Teachers find this to be a lot of work, and they instantly become discouraged. Learners get into the continual progression web because teachers feel they cannot engage in the daunting administration task.

Progressed learners are often the ones who need this intervention and departmental heads indicated that teachers bypass this process because they lack proper evidence and interest. The DBE's goal is to popularise consistent, up-to-standard education for each and every learner, regardless of their gender, life circumstances, health conditions, intelligence, competence degree, economic status or any possibly limiting circumstance (Thwala and Makoelle 2022:12).

Departmental heads indicated that referring learners is a complex task that demands a lot from them and teachers, and that teachers get demoralised and unable to even attempt to refer

learners. They believe many learners would be referred if was not for the long referral process. They explained as follows:

“The inclusive education personnel make referring learners a complicated task. They demand us to provide evidence on how teachers have assisted the learner and how we have concluded that the learner needs special education. This means there must be medical evidence if required and fill in a lot of forms. They often return the forms with the justification that the forms are incorrectly filled and that sometimes when they have to come to schools to assist in identifying these learners, they come with excuses such as lack of transport. This process takes close to a year, and at the end of it, the learner gets progressed to the next grade with information gaps” (DH1, School A).

“The idea of referring learners is well intentioned but it requires lot of energy and administration, filling in forms is such a daunting task because there is a lot of evidence that goes with the forms. Some learner’s problem we cannot explain or diagnose, we just realise the learner has a problem and refer them. If the department is not satisfied, they gladly return the forms for more evidence” (DH1, School B).

“I do not remember the number of learners I have referred, with substantial evidence on the matter of the learner and academic evidence on how I have assisted. Up to now, I have not received any response regarding the referrals and unfortunately the learners are being progressed from one grade to another, with information gaps, the teachers often think I did not do submissions” (DH2, School C)

“The proposition of referring learners is a good initiative. It would be more effective if there was not a lot of paperwork to do. Teachers often argue when they have to refer learners especially in the intermediate and senior phases. The subject teacher will argue that the class teacher must fill in the forms, and vice versa. In the foundation phase, the current grade teacher feels the previous teacher was supposed to have filled in the forms because he/she knows the learner better. So referrals hardly happen and teachers let learners slide through the progression net” (DH1, School D).

4.6.2 School-based support team

In 2014, the DBE introduced a policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS), that clearly indicates how learners with special needs must be referred for special education. The purpose of this document is to regulate the protocols to recognise, evaluate and offer solutions to learners who are in need of added support to improve their engagement at schools (DBE 2014). The policy, furthermore, directs that schools must have a school-based support team (SBST) as an assistance mechanism to ensure that the school develops inclusivity regarding learning and accommodates diverse learners (DBE 2014). Also, the SBST must observe and account for the development of at-risk learners. There must be a file for SBST in schools that contains information on all progressed learners, and strategies that can assist them. In responding to the above question, departmental heads reported as follows:

“Our school has selected members of our SBST committee and it is very hands-on in seeing that those progressed learners and their teachers are assisted effectively. They keep a file with them that contains information on how the school monitored and supported progress of these learners” (DH2, School A).

“Our SBST committee has developed enrichment programmes and they keep records of every progressed learner’s response to the programme for quarterly reports to parents. We also ascertain that each teacher has their learners profiles in place with the necessary learner information such as medical condition, parents information and education history” (DH2, School B).

“Often these progressed learners skip school for various reasons; either they are demotivated, neglected at home or come from child-headed families. Through our SBST committee, we appoint the school social worker that has been allocated by the Department of Education to intervene between the learner and parents and to sensitise the parents on the effects of bunking classes” (DH1, School C).

“I am a member of our school SBST committee. We have put it upon ourselves that for learners who struggle financially, we seek for donations and charity. We also go to their homes to familiarise ourselves with their home conditions and even go around the township seeking responses on why the learner does not regularly attend school. We do it even for the promoted learners because sometimes these progressed learners recruit them into these bad deeds” (DH2, School D).

Once information about all the special education learners and relevant matters hindering learners' teaching and learning has been passed on to the SBST, the remaining progressed learners need to be given appropriate attention by their parents and teachers.

4.7 THEME 4: TEACHER STRATEGIES FOR ASSISTING PROGRESSED LEARNERS

The discussion on SBSTs lead to the next theme, which was aimed at addressing the third research question: *What strategies do teachers employ in assisting the progressed learners to ensure effective implementation of the policy?* During the semi-structured interviews, teachers were asked, *Do you have any strategies in place to enhance the teaching and learning of progressed learners?* Departmental heads were asked, *What strategies do teachers employ in assisting the progressed learners?* The same question was asked deliberately, to check for consistencies in the narration of teachers and departmental heads' observations.

Departmental heads narrated that, in schools, teachers are the primary facilitators in developing knowledge through use of various pedagogical strategies that keep learners active and engaged in their learning. Teaching strategies can be selected by the teacher according to the class size, resources available and topic to be covered. Whitton (2015:3) describes that pedagogy plans can be applied solely or in unison in activities or lessons that have been proposed. In the opinion of Moagi (2020:31) repetition of learning content, differentiated instruction and direct and indirect instruction are teaching strategies that are suitable for teaching progressed learners.

From narratives given by teachers, it was gathered that teachers use a one-size-fits-all approach to instructing learners. Learners are subjected to a similar teaching strategy and assessment methods regardless of their differing abilities and interests. This is unfair to progressed learners, because they have clearly indicated that they have weaknesses that may need to be handled differently. (Brahmbhatt 2020:3) indicates that it is mandatory for teachers to devise support strategies in the classroom to aid learners who are socially promoted, to align their academic level with those of their peers, so they do not fall into an on-going cycle of progression without meeting the necessary promotion requirements

4.7.1 Remediation time

Remediation time is a period that is put aside by a teacher to assist struggling learners. Remediation time can be created during and after school hours. Some teachers indicated that they create remedial time to help learners to achieve their full potential. Special time is allocated where they create special time to struggling learners, who are given the opportunity for more refined practise, repetition and clarification of content.

During the interviews process, teachers expressed their views that;

“I try to improve my progressed learners’ abilities. I have learners who cannot write at all, even their names. So I take advantage of short breaks and lunch time to practise them in writing. I have given them extra activity books that may also serve as evidence at a later stage” (AT3).

“As an English teacher, I have called parents for a meeting to ask them to allow learners to watch television, especially cartoons because that is what interests learners. They learn a lot of English. Also, I have asked them to lend learners their phones for You-Tube learning activities” (AT4).

“During life skills, I integrate multiple learning areas; maths and language. I do this because learners enjoy learning through play. So in order for them to remember content, I integrate my teaching with play. I also bring visual aids to school to enhance their learning” (BT2).

The following strategies were reported:

“I make use of DAR period to focus only on learners with learning barriers. I attend to them individually to provide them with expanded opportunities and also divide them into small groups to promote social and peer learning. Learners become motivated and hands on” (AT3).

“I encourage my learners’ parents to take the learners to after-school tutoring as another option that helps the progressed learners to keep up with their brighter peers” (CT1).

“My struggling learners and I usually get to school an hour earlier than other teachers and learners. I train them a lot on reading and writing skills because that is

where they lack the most. So they feel comfortable learning those in their separate space because they do not feel intimidated by the smart learners” (CT2).

“The progressed learners have a tendency of seldom attending school, I create remediation time because they have fallen behind so I try to get them back on track and develop essential skills. I usually take an hour after school with them, because I understand they are already exhausted from their day classes” (DT1).

“Because learners are rotating now because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the progressed learners come to school every day so that they catch up and come to speed in their weaker areas. There is a huge difference and they have overcome roadblocks that limited their potential. It could have been the opposite if I allowed them to follow the rotation timetable because they have a habit of forgetting learned content” (DT3).

Some teachers seemed to oppose instituting remediation time, because it demands endless paperwork and extended working hours. They hinted that some parents also have problems with after-school extra classes because learners arrive home later than usual. They commented as follows:

“Progressed learners also have a problem, they do not want to stay behind. They lose interest and their attention span is low because they are often in a hurry to join play with their peers out of classroom. I refer them to our SBST school enrichment programme that is aimed at promoting and encouraging active participation in academics and extra mural activities. They get used to staying after school and I alternate days between the activities and class learning as a way to cheat them” (BT2).

“Parents do not feel comfortable with their children arriving home later than usual. I usually did afternoon classes with the retained and progressed learners. I had to halt the classes for that reason” (CT1).

“The problem with creating remediation time is that I have to prepare different activities and time table for the progressed learners. I also have to mark their work. This needs a lot of preparation, which leads to a lot of time spent on preparing for them only” (CT3).

“I have to prepare a different lesson plan and activities that will suit the progressed learners. I also have to create time outside of normal teaching hours because during the day we follow the standard table that is designed according to CAPS. So I usually don’t find a perfect time for all these, I find it overwhelming and demanding a lot of administration” (DT4).

In an interview with departmental heads, they confessed that teachers do not create time to drill progressed learners. They reported that, even if teachers do this, they do not do it consistently. They gave differing opinions regarding teachers’ creation of remediation time, and reported as follows:

“Firstly, a teacher must identify the learning gaps that hinder the learner’s progress and development, especially in the classroom. After identifying them, relevant learning material and teaching strategies must be in place to remediate the situation, and necessary monitoring of progress must be done by the teacher. Teachers do not do this at all. Whether or not the learner fails the grade or gets progressed, they are less bothered” (DH1, School A).

“Teachers do not want to create remedial time for progressed learners. They often follow their seven-hour work time routine and specification, of which they do not get sufficient time to give individual attention to struggling learners” (DH2, School C).

“Some teachers create time to give struggling learners attention even though they do not maintain the consistency. Some teachers do not create remediation at all, they demand incentives if they are to teach and assist learners after work hours” (DH1, School D).

4.7.2 One-size-fits-all approach

A one-size-fits-all approach is an approach in which a teacher uses a particular teaching strategy for all learners, without considering the learners’ abilities and weaknesses. Teachers reported that they used the same approaches and strategies to teach all the learners in their classrooms. They justified this approach by saying that they have not been offered training on how to teach struggling learners. Some teachers said they try to vary their strategies in order to come to the learner’s level of comprehension. They stated that,

“I teach them in the same way. The main problem is lack of resources for me. We only have textbooks and wall charts. There is nothing more to assist in my teaching” (AT3).

“Teaching resources are too scarce to address the challenges of the progressed learners. We do not have reading aids such as library books with pictures, language charts that guide on how words are built in both languages” (DT2).

During their interviews, departmental heads acknowledged that teachers teach the learners on the same conveyor belt, without considering their varying abilities and difficulties. Teachers do not alter their lesson plans to accommodate progressed learners. They pointed out that,

“Teacher’s lesson plans do not accommodate the progressed and retained learners. They teach all the learners in the same way and they do not get positive results because these strategies clearly did not work in the preceding classes” (DH2, School B).

DH1, School C shared a similar opinion and said,

“Lesson planning is a confrontation that has influence on the performance of progressed learners. Teachers do not plan lessons that benefit differing learners of various cognitive learners” (DH1, School C).

“Inclusive education workshops usually give us strategies on how to teach struggling learners or learners of different abilities to make the classroom inclusive to all needs. Teachers need to use those strategies if any of the progressed learners show an indication for their needs” (DH1, School D).

“Teachers do not vary their teaching and assessment strategies to cater for progressed learners. They paint the learners with the same brush, and that does not help in any way. Instead, the progressed learners feel a sense of negative completion between them and their peers because they feel the content is too advanced for them” (DH2, School D).

Kika and Kotze (2019:13) report that teachers lack the capability and skills to offer differentiated support to progressed learners, and the situation is exacerbated by heavy workloads. In Section 2.3, it was explained that teachers usually hold the opinion that progressed learners are a part of the larger school community within the grade or age cohort,

and consequently they do not identify progressed learners and offer them special support. Mupa and Chinooneka (2015:130) express that creating variety in teaching and learning material when scheming and planning promotes effective teaching. This is in accordance with what Knight 2014 (as quoted by Ramputla 2020:20) states, that the progressed learner is not targeted for interventions to try and address the problem areas that have led to prior grade repetition and ensuing progression.

4.8 THEME 5: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICY AND ITS EFFECTS

What are your overall thoughts about this policy? Do you think the policy has lasting implications or effects on the learners?

In response to this question, the analysis of teachers' interviews reveal that the policy yielded both positive and negative results. On the positive side, most teachers agreed that the policy lowered dropout rates.

4.8.1 Decrease in dropout

The progression policy, known in some countries as the social promotion policy, was primarily established to decrease the high number of dropouts, which seemed to increase when learners were retained. Learners repeated grades numerous times, until the expected minimum requirements were obtained. This discouraged learners and they eventually dropped out of the school system. Some teachers in the Motheo district perceived the progression policy to be favourable, because learners are compulsorily pushed through the school system, and they receive Grade 12 certificates if they apply more effort in later grades.

“The DBE has come up with a plausible solution to decrease the dropout rates. A lot of learners, especially in high school, drop out when they feel academically challenged” (AT2).

“High dropout rates have social, and economic implications for the school, parents and learners. The school and parents lose money while trying to keep learners in the school system. Learners lose their self-esteem and confidence as a result of multiple retentions” (BT4).

“When learners get to the first grade of schooling, they meet new friends, who are often in their age cohort. When being retained multiple times, they feel a disconnection from their peers and this slowly encourages them to drop out” (DT1).

The attempt by the DBE to lower the dropout rate seemed to be a bone of contention amongst other teachers. Some indicated that the policy increased the dropout rate, because learners struggle to comprehend learning content in later grades. They said that, when learners advance with information gaps, they ultimately feel challenged in advanced grades and eventually dropout. CT1 and CT3 remarked that,

“The policy creates a problem going forward in comprehending new, advanced information. It promotes learner drop out because learners sometimes advance from foundation to intermediate phase with little or no knowledge” (CT1 and CT3).

At School D, DT3 reflected that,

“The policy does injustice to the learners. They are just pushed through to the next grade, without meeting the requirements. They are not given knowledge to cope in the next grade” (DT3, School D).

These views confirm those of Muedi, Kutame, Ngidi and Uleanya (2021:138), namely that many undergraduates dropout of their first year at university, which suggests that there are threats that might have been overlooked or were not properly addressed in their primary and secondary education. Primary and secondary education acts as a continuum with university education, and if challenges encountered in the early phases are not adequately addressed, they may cause challenges at university, that may lead to students dropping out.

4.8.2 Deteriorating education standard

Whether or not learners drop out of the education system, the quality of education and learner level outcomes are declining significantly. More learners are kept in the system, while Grade 12 results deteriorate (Mogale and Modipane 2021:1). This decline could be the result of the policy being implemented ineffectively, or that its implementation should be monitored more effectively. Matoti (2010, quoted by Adonis 2021:76) reports that concerns about the deteriorating standard of education include questions about unprepared learners ensuing from internal promotion operations, and the eagerness of schools to obtain elevated success rates.

During the analysis, it was discovered that teachers believe the progression policy contributes to the decline in education quality. They reported that the policy produces incompetent learners for workplaces and challenges prospective tertiary students.

“The sad thing about this policy is that learners get to matric without even knowing how to construct a simple sentence. How is such a learner expected to get a proper job in the future?” (AT2).

“Learners leave the grade with lack of knowledge and eventually fail matric because that is the final stage where all content learned from foundation to senior phase is displayed. This reflects badly on the pass rate of our learners” (AT4).

“The progression policy degrades the quality of education and the type of society we will live with in the future. It influences progressed learners’ way of thinking, that things can be achieved without hard work” (BT3).

Building on this finding, Makhanya (2021:66) postulates that progressing learners may leave them unprepared for the future in terms of future senior grades, as well matric and the NSC, where the progression policy does not apply.

4.8.3 Behavioural problems

Khobe (2021:3) pronounces that the majority of progressed learners encounter academic hurdles and behavioural issues. This could be the result of them having given up on learning, and thereby diverting attention from their shortcomings, wanting control and power, and wanting the attention successful learners receive.

This subtheme summarises various views of participants pertaining to the concept of the behaviour and discipline of progressed learners. In addressing the matter, a great number of teachers criticised the behaviour of progressed learners and indicated that they were problematic, they disturbed class stability by physically or verbally assaulting other learners, they talked when they should be quiet, they argued with the teacher unnecessarily, ignored instructions and disengaged from tasks given in the classroom. Khobe (2021:3) indicates that, despite the fact that the SPP aims to offer progressed learners a helping hand in terms of departing the education system with a qualification, it has become apparent that many progressed learners still experience academic barriers and behavioural issues. The barriers

hinder and decrease education attainment of both progressed and promoted learners. Makhanya (2021:36) claims that misbehaviour is a limit to learning and teaching and learning is interrupted for the entire class when most of the teaching and learning time is directed to disciplining disruptive learners.

“The progressed learners are problematic, they disturb the class’s stability, they do not listen because they are aware that they will pass either way” (AT1).

“Because progressed learners have come to realise that they pass regardless, they go to the extent of not writing in class, even their assignments. They encourage others in class to join their playful activities” (AT3).

“When progressed learners feel challenged by their class activities or content, they withdraw from the lesson and start engaging in unnecessary physical activities such as throwing wet papers at each other, visiting the toilet regularly, and teasing others” (AT4).

“When I ask questions, normally progressed learners do not respond. It becomes different when they know the answers to the questions, they speak out of turn, in high volume. They do not raise their hands to be called on to speak” (BT2)

“The struggling learner’s behaviour is poor. I wish corporal punishment was not abolished. They have given up on learning and have turned themselves into rascals. Sometimes their parents can’t control them too” (BT3).

Similarly, CT3 concurred that

“When I give out instructions in class, for instance when I ask learners to take out their exercise books from their school bags, these progressed learners do the opposite, instead they ignore and even avoid eye contact with me” (CT3).

DT2 disclosed that

“The elderly progressed learners usually bully other learners and physically assault them. They are even non-compliant in most classroom rules. Progressed learners do the opposite of what I have instructed them not to do” (DT2).

Teachers also indicated that parents have the misguided perception that they (teachers) are the only ones expected to discipline the learners. Parents feel that, because they are not part

of the classroom and school activities, teachers have the sole responsibility of disciplining learners. Teachers report that parents are unaware that discipline at home is equally important.

“When you report ill-discipline to the parents of the learners, they seem less concerned and bothered. They expect me to handle the discipline of their children alone, and some misconduct originate from the children’s home culture or environment, such as swearing at other learners. We do not teach learners insults. What they don’t realise is that we need to work collaboratively to reprimand bad behaviour and instil discipline in these learners” (DT3).

“At the beginning of the year, learners are given a copy of a code of conduct. They take it home where parents are also expected to familiarise themselves with so that they also assist on the discipline aspect. During parent meetings, proper discipline is always emphasised by the SMT so that parents are aware of how their children are expected to conduct themselves when at school. The way these learners misbehave, I doubt whether parents stress the importance of good behaviour or they feel we as teachers are the only ones mandated to do so” (DT4).

Participants reported that progressed learners’ behaviour is appalling. Such conduct, if not controlled, may encourage a wider group of learners to behave in disruptive ways. If teachers avoid reprimanding or engaging with learners, misbehaving learners may escalate their disruptive behaviour to obtain teacher and peer attention. Makhanya (2021:36) reports that misbehaviour limits learning and teaching, and learning is interrupted for the entire class when most of the time is directed into disciplining these learners. A teacher must have a strict or strong approach to discipline.

4.8.4 Delaying curriculum coverage, and excessive workload

In teaching and learning, a teacher ought to maintain an effective pace, and progress at the required speed. The DBE regulates teachers’ pace through employment of pacesetters and the annual teaching plan (ATP), that was used as trimmed curriculum guide that was followed during the COVID-19 pandemic. These documents are helpful because, if used effectively, the teacher does not waste time unnecessarily on one topic, or move too fast through another. Pacesetters assist in striking a balance between topics taught in the grade. Classrooms have

learners of differing comprehension levels, and bringing them to the same understanding may not be an easy balance to achieve, so the pacesetter provides a uniform strategy for teaching all the learners.

Teachers in this study mentioned that having progressed learners in their classes causes unnecessary delay of curriculum coverage, and increases their workload. Also, they indicated that progressed learners suffer as a result of the pacesetter, because teachers sometimes have to move on to a new topic and leave behind progressed learners who have not grasped the content. The participants agreed that, in the case of progressed learners, the policy resonates with quantity without quality. Also, teachers' workload is increased, because they have to create remediation time to assist these learners. It is indicated by Makhanya (2021:29) that policies in South Africa, including the progression policy, have been adopted from Western countries, which seem to be performing well academically because they have strong remediation in place, thus, resulting in outstanding performance in comparative tests. It could also be advantageous for South African teachers to adopt this technique, in order to achieve optimal academic results. At School A, teachers posited the following,

“The policy causes delay in curriculum coverage. A lesson that has to take 30 minutes is prolonged to an hour because I have to drill the progressed learners separately after teaching all the other learners” (AT2).

“When introducing a topic, progressed learners do not engage because they are blank. It becomes a class dominated by promoted learners. There is less interaction from them. They do not do their homework, so it becomes difficult for me to know whether they have understood the lesson content. I take a long time to get information and responses from them, so it causes me to delay and I get left behind with covering curriculum” (AT4).

At School B, BT1 and BT2 held the view that they wasted a lot of time trying to bring progressed learners up to speed. These learners miss tests and lessons and this requires teachers to go back to the missed lessons when the learners return to school. Doing so wastes teachers' time and causes delay regarding curriculum coverage for other learners.

“We basically teach two grades, the grade in which the learner was in and their current grade. We do this to fill in the gap from the previous grade. It is time wasting because we have to move on with the pacesetter” (BT3).

“The biggest challenge about teaching them is that we tend to want to cover curriculum as per the pacesetter while also leaving behind progressed learners. Progress of the teacher is majored in terms of curriculum coverage” (CT2).

DT1 from School D’s view was comparable to other participants’ as they conveyed that,

“Teachers are unable to provide necessary support to the progressed learners because they have to move with the pacesetter” (DT1, School D).

4.8.5 Loss of interest and motivation

Motivation enhances learners’ performance, in that it activates and encourages positive behaviour towards achieving their goals. When learners are adequately motivated, they, in turn, motivate the teacher and make teaching and learning fun, timeous and productive. When they are less interested and demotivated, they attain low-level outcomes.

In agreement with Stott et al. (2015:93), teachers reported that one of the issues regarding the progression policy is that it demotivates learners from striving for better performance, due to the lack of intimidation of grade retention. Teachers elucidated that learners have become conscious of the existence of this policy, therefore, their academic efforts are declining. Parents are also aware of the policy, and their support to their children is deteriorating. Teachers are not an exception in this matter; they too have reduced their support with regard to teaching, because they perceive that the learners will automatically make it to the next grade. This loss of motivation and interest becomes threatening to the learners’ education. Sayed, Kanjee and Nkomo (2013, quoted by Adonis 2021:93) concur that effective learner education attainment will only be completely accomplished in a tripartite collaboration amongst teachers, learners and parents.

“The policy creates less interest and cooperation from parents because they are fully aware that a learner cannot repeat a phase more than once” (AT2).

“The policy breaks the spirit of hard work and competition amongst learners. They no longer find it befitting to secure a number one or best learner in class spot” (BT3).

“The policy does not only demotivate progressed learners, the promoted learners also become discouraged to work effortlessly because they know they will still be in the next grade with the less performing learners” (CT1).

“Learners become bored and passive because they do not understand the subject matter. This is when they start becoming disruptive in class” (DT3).

“Their work ethic is very poor. They do not complete activities, either class or homework activities. It is even worse for learners who are not given necessary attention at home. They would rather copy work from their neighbours without proper understanding of the work assigned” (DT4).

This supports the literature cited (Chataa and Nkengbeza 2020:1738), that the progression policy demotivates learners in that they do not feel the need to display a competitive spirit. Makhanya (2021:3) states that the policy demotivates learners from learning at all, as any student can now progress without academically deserving the promotion. This means that the policy demotivates promoted learners to work hard, because they feel the progressed learners enjoy equal benefits as they do, without investing in hard work and commitment to their studies.

“The policy provides challenges as parents are no longer committed in their children’s education like before. So they do not encourage our learners to work hard because promotion is now an automatic affair” (DT1).

“We have also become demotivated as teachers. We do not work towards understanding the different challenges amongst learners, which led to their progression web, we just teach them for compliance because they will pass regardless” (DT3).

CT3 shared a similar view, that,

“We teachers and parents have somewhat given up on the education of these learners, I wish we could all give our all and become fully involved so that these learners are motivated too. We do not care at all, and it is becoming evident” (CT3).

From the above narratives, it is evident that teachers consider the policy to be demotivating for learners, parents and teachers. What, then, happens when no one is interested and motivated? All of them need support from each other to function effectively. There needs to be a tripartite collaboration if quality and effective teaching and learning is to be achieved. This idea reflects the researcher back to the need for proper training for teachers, so that they

are better equipped to teach and handle these learners, because parents and learners are fully dependent on teachers.

4.9 THEME 6: STIPULATIONS OF THE POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA, ROLE OF THE SCHOOL AND TEACHERS, AND MONITORING OF THE IMPLEMENTATION POLICY

In South Africa, the promotion and progression policy was developed by the Department of Education to remedy high dropout rates that seemed to escalate as a result of more learners being retained, and ultimately dropping out of the school system. The South African Schools Act 84 section 3 (1) makes it mandatory for every learner of school-going age, that is, from age seven to 15 years, or Grade 9, to be enrolled in school; and for the parents to provide the necessary support. This is also in line with South Africa's attempts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and Education For All, which states that citizens should all have access to education. Because of these recommendations, the Department of Education pushes learners through the system, whether they have met the requirements or not. The progression policy prescribes that a learner may repeat a phase only once and must be in the appropriate age cohort to be in a certain grade (DBE 2012:7). Learners are advanced with their age cohort or according to the number of years they have spent in a phase.

The progression policy directs that progressed learners must be supported to adjust to the demands of the grade they are in, so as to break the cycle of progression. In the case of strategies to support learners, the policy states that it is mandatory for schools and districts to outline vividly coherent mediation plans that are inclusive of a timely identification of low performers or learners who are at risk so that the district, province and school can devise alternative learning opportunities (Kika and Kotze 2019:4). It is mandatory for teachers to devise support strategies in the classroom to aid learners who have been progressed, to align their academic level with that of their peers, so that they do not gravitate into an on-going cycle of progression without meeting the necessary promotion requirements (Brahmbhatt 2020:3). Teachers ought to apply different pedagogic skills to enhance their teaching, both in and out of classroom, in order to bring progressed learners up to speed. The principal, through the departmental heads, must monitor the implementation of the policy and, at the end of the year, the education department, through its district office and circuit manager,

must inspect the mark schedules to determine whether schools have complied with the stipulations of the policy.

Based on these prescriptions and this theme, teachers were asked, *How is the implementation of the policy monitored?*

4.9.1 Monitoring and follow-up on implementation

Teachers indicated that monitoring of implementation of the progression policy is done only when the year ends. During the year, the SMT does not follow up on whether progressed learners are given the attention they require.

“We are not monitored during the year. We teach our learners whichever way we prefer as long as information is imparted and curriculum covered” (AT1).

“Actually, monitoring of the implementation of the policy is done only at the end of the year through mark schedules. That is when the principal makes sure that the learner is not repeating a phase for the second time and that a learner is in the appropriate age cohort” (CT1).

“Monitoring is only done at the end of the year. When we have district based support team, one would expect that they will assist the SMT’s in monitoring whether we are implementing the policy successfully. Instead, they just check teacher portfolios and whether teaching and learning is being conducted according to CAPS specifications. Basically they monitor curriculum only. They do not even demand to know how we assist progressed learners” (DT3).

DH’s were asked, *Do teachers and the school follow the stipulations of the policy?* and *Do you follow up on the implementation of the policy?*

In the cross questioning, some departmental heads also disclosed that they do not do any monitoring during the year. They only do it at the end of the year, when report cards are being issued. They check whether the teachers comply with pass requirements as stipulated by the NPA and NPPPR of the NCS on the recording and reporting process. In the case of a learner who did not make the cut, teachers are required to call the learner’s parents to discuss whether the learner must be retained or progressed. The parents sign an acknowledgement

form, which must then be submitted to the departmental head. In responding to the above questions, departmental heads revealed the following;

“We do not monitor teachers. I understand it is their duty to ensure that all learners pass. They know they have to come up with the strategies that can assist these learners in the barriers they have” (DH1, School A).

“At the end of the year, the principal asks us as DH’s to sit with the teachers and go through the mark schedules to check for the requirements of the progression policy before she can submit to the district office. That is the only monitoring we do” (DH2, School B).

Other departmental heads indicated that they do monitor the implementation of the policy and, even though they do not go to the classes physically, they monitor in administrative ways.

“We as DH’s have a responsibility of ascertaining that committees function optimally. Amongst the committees we have at school, there is the SBST committee, which deals specifically with inclusive learning. We make sure that they follow up on every progressed learner, whether or not there is improvement in their studies” (DH1, School A).

“Every term beginning, it is mandatory that every teacher does a subject improvement plan and error and item analysis. This is where the teacher records challenges experienced by most learners in a particular subject. The teachers then note down intervention strategies they will use to rectify the challenges, so I can boldly say I monitor them because they submit the required documents and sometimes there becomes an improvement in the learner’s performance. So we all know that struggling learners are the retained and progressed” (DH2, School C).

“I do monitor the implementation, although I do not go to classes to physically monitor teachers and learners. Results speak for themselves. Teachers know that should they not meet at least 80% pass rate, they have to justify that. Also, I check their files every fortnight for intervention strategies in their lesson plans (DH1, School C).

“Every term beginning, teachers have to compile a report of most challenges in the task papers that learners were confronted with. After identifying the challenges, they compile an item and error analysis and subject improvement plan for the discussed challenges. There must be clearly defined intervention strategies that will assist the learners. I do monitor them” (DH1, School D).

“Since COVID-19, the department wants to adopt the ‘no child must be left behind’ strategy. Sometimes we don’t have a choice but to retain the learner. So we call upon parents to discuss whether or not the learner must be retained or progressed, of course substantiating with evidence to convince the parent. If the parent agrees that the learner must be retained or progressed, they fill in an acknowledgement form. So before submitting the mark schedules to the district office, such evidence must be forwarded to the principal through departmental heads” (DH2, School D).

4.10 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

According to Maree and Nieuwenhuis (2019:100), when analysing data using documents (textual data), the focus should be on all sorts of written correspondence that can elucidate the circumstances under investigation, regardless of whether it is in printed or digital format. It is a form of qualitative research that helps to analyse documentary evidence and respond to specific research questions.

The researcher perused documents to discover the exact connotation of the narrations by participants. The researcher expected participants to avoid imparting personal bias when responding to questions. In this section, themes were developed from the information gathered from the documents and that enabled the researcher to discuss the data unit by unit.

The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of teachers about the implementation of the progression policy in primary schools. The researcher had to analyse the progression and promotion policies that guide how learners are to be promoted and progressed to the following grade, which are the NPA and NPPPR of the NCS. These policies assisted in responding to the research subquestion, *What are the stipulations and intend of the progression policy in South Africa, and the roles of teachers and schools in this regard?*

It was presumed that an analysis of these documents could assist in identifying the conditions, prerequisites, aim and plan of this policy in the education system of South Africa

and provide information on how teachers and schools have an obligation to turn the implementation of this policy into a successful reality.

4.10.1 National Protocol for Assessment Grades R–12

The DBE (2012) projects that the NPA for Grades 1 to 12 assimilates the record keeping and disclosure procedures for the grades above within the NCS structure, which comprises

1. CAPS statement for NCS grades for all listed subjects;
2. NPPPR as a policy document that states the conditions of the NCS for Grades R to 12 and
3. NPA Grades R–12.

As indicated in Chapter 1, the focal point of these policy documents is the policy for assessing internally, which entails applicable year-end examinations, school-based assessment and pragmatic assessment. The policy, furthermore, furnishes plans on how schools must manage assessments, and records and fundamental prerequisites for the handling of school assessment and its records and fundamental demands for, and also examples of, report cards, recording sheets, teacher files, learner profiles and mark schedules. All of these guide public, special and independent schools and assists them to standardise the recording and reporting of assessment to the education department at the end of the year. Continuous feedback assists teachers, the school and the education department in reaching an informed conclusion on whether effective teaching and learning materialised, through comparing what has been taught to what has been learnt, and whether learning objectives have been achieved. In the opinion of Heritage (2010:2), assessment is a way to improve teaching, and ensuring that assessment and the teaching process are inseparable – one cannot take place without the other.

4.10.1.1 Assessment in schools

According to Adigun (2016:2), in order for teachers to conclude what learners know, comprehend and are capable doing, teachers need to conduct continuous assessment as a classroom plan, which is executed to discover learners' understanding, skills and knowledge. These types of assessment ought to be conducted in different ways. The Department of

Education makes it mandatory for teachers in South Africa to carry out school-based assessment and practical assessment tasks, and guides the assessment process.

As explained in Chapter 2 section 4 (1) of the NPA, assessment should be both formal and informal. In both cases, it is vital that learners are knowledgeable about the skills being assessed, and feedback must be issued to learners to amplify the learning experience. It is encouraged that, after feedback is given to learners, a whole-class discussion must take place on the required responses to the assessment activity, so that learners learn from each other through different responses and ideas.

Section 4 (5) points out that the forms of assessment used should be suitable for the development level, competency and age of the learners in the phase. The design of these tasks should, therefore, ascertain that a variety of skills are assessed according to the CAPS. This then means that the teacher is at liberty to design tasks that suit the progressed learners' academic level and age.

Section 4 (4) highlights that types of formal assessment include tests, examinations, practical demonstrations, oral presentations, projects and demonstrations. Before the school year commences, it is mandatory for teachers to record learner's attainment in previously administered formal assessment activities and to submit it to management, together with a guideline on when assessment will be carried out. This guideline must be sent home with learners, so that parents can assist learners to prepare for tasks on the set dates.

4.10.1.2 Assessment of learners with special needs

Learners with special needs include students with emotional and behaviour disorders, autism spectrum disorder, learning disabilities, dyslexia, language and communication challenges, attention deficit / hyperactivity disorder, and physical and sensory disabilities (Martin, Sperling and Newton 2020:1). All these different conditions could prevent learners from performing optimally and meet the requirements of learning. The majority of progressed learners fall in one group of barriers. Learners in ordinary public schools who seem to face unsolvable barriers, such as physical disabilities, are referred to special schools where they should receive the necessary attention, and their special education needs dealt with.

The NPA policy signifies that learners facing learning barriers in both ordinary and special schools need to be able to exit school with recognition of competence (DBE 2012). It

articulates, furthermore, that there must be coherence in the presentation of inclusive assessment procedures, and implementation must be extended to grades in the entire school. For learners who face learning barriers, who might need alternative methods to signify whether they have grasped concepts, skills and knowledge, the following range of alternative assessments must be utilised.

- For learners with major intellectual disabilities, their general assessment must be grounded on the class level, but with reduction in depth, complications and breadth. The focus must be on learners who are cognitively challenged and who are registered in ordinary and public schools.
- Learners who are functioning on class level matter that the general assessment covers may need extra time to become masters of the content due to their disabilities.
- Learners with barriers or learning challenges may need testing patterns and procedures that offer them uniform opportunities to reveal their understanding of content that is at the same grade level as the general assessment. Target learners must be blind, have communication impairments, physically disabled, dyslexic or deaf and acute hearing.

The policy encourages and advocates for inclusive assessment in schools. From the data gathered from participants, it was found that teachers use a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and assessment. Progressed and retained learners are taught and assessed in similar ways as promoted and gifted learners are, in spite of their competency levels differing. Not all students learn in the same way. So, teaching strategies ought to be differentiated to suit the individual needs of each unique learner. Teachers ignore this condition and thereby disadvantage learners.

4.10.1.3 Recording and reporting learner performance

The DBE (2012) in Chapter 5, section 15 (1), declares that recording is the procedure by which the teacher files and registers the performance of a learner on assessment previously conducted. In South African schools, progress in the attainment in subjects specified in the CAPS must also indicate confirmation of the development of learners' intellectual advancement in grades, and their preparedness to be promoted or progressed to the following grade.

Reporting is described by the DBE (2012) as a procedure for disseminating information to schools, tertiary institutions, parents and learners. Learners' performance may be recorded and reported in multiple ways, including school visit days, parent meetings, phone calls, letters and newsletters.

4.10.2 National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statements Grades R–12

This policy, the NPPPR, must be read together with the NPA, because they both provide guidance on how learners must be promoted, retained and progressed in schools. It also gives guidance on activities and procedures for the assessment of learner achievement. Collectively, these policies are referred to as the progression policy.

4.10.2.1 Progression requirements for Grades 1–3

Grades R–3 are the foundation phase grades, which form a child's first few years of formal schooling. The DBE, through the NPPPR, stipulates how learners are to be progressed through these phases. It states that a learner must be progressed from grade to grade throughout the phase they are in with the appropriate age group, except if the learner exhibits inability to keep it with the content of the ensuing grade. To discover the degree of support needed, a learner who is deemed not to be ready for the following level must be assessed (DBE 2011).

Section 3 (4) states that, to prevent a learner from being retained more than once in the foundation phase, a learner must be proceed to the following grade. When a learner who has been retained in the phase does not exhibit the necessary performance, they ought to receive the support they require so that they can be progressed to the following grade. They must be evaluated internally as per the stipulations indicated in the NPA.

4.10.2.2 Progression requirements for Grades 4–6

Grades 4 – 6 are the intermediate phase grades and, in these grades, learners must be progressed within their relevant age groups, except if the learners exhibit inadequacy in capability for succeeding grade tasks. In this phase, too, learners must be evaluated internally as per the stipulations of the NPA.

4.10.2.3 Promotion requirements for Grades 7–9

Grades 7–9 are the senior phase grades, but because primary schooling ends with Grade 7, attention will be focused up to this level. A learner may only be kept back once in this phase, in order to prevent a learner from remaining in a phase for a period exceeding four years (DBE 2011). Munje and Maarman (2016:187–188) assert that a learner is obligated to be promoted if they have been retained once in a phase or grade. The policy ensures that a learner is given a chance to progress with their age cohort. Section 21 (3) clearly articulates that a learner who is incapable of performing at the required level, and learners who have been kept back in the past four grades, should receive the necessary support.

Generally, the policies prescribe that learners must be taught and assessed according to their abilities and competence levels. This is a directive most schools and teachers fail to apply. The policies do not clearly outline what “necessary support” means or provide guidelines for a detailed way to support these learners. Because of this shortcoming, teachers do what they find fitting and what they believe is best.

4.11 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study is embedded in social justice theory. The discussion of these findings is constructed from the perspective of social justice theory as well as the literature review in Chapter 2 of this research study.

This research study explored the perceptions of teachers on the progression policy in primary schools. In total 24 participants from four schools were sampled from Manyatseng Township in Ladybrand. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were employed to gather data, which were thematically analysed to interpret and make sense of the participants’ views and perceptions regarding the progression policy in their respective schools. This chapter contains a discussion of the findings in relation to the participants’ views, through the use of social justice theory.

4.11.1 Discussion linking research findings to the theoretical framework

4.11.1.1 Social justice theory

This theory is grounded on a belief in fairness for people and their relations, and equal access to opportunities and social privileges within a society. This study advocated for teachers' perceptions to be heard as a way of upholding social justice at schools and in the education sector as a whole. The researcher embedded the study in social justice theory because teachers also need equal opportunities to raise their concerns about policies that guide them, in this study, the progression policy. Knowing more about teachers' beliefs is crucial, since they can play either a facilitating or inhibiting role in translating the policy into a daily reality of what happens in the classroom. When teachers are unable to negotiate their emotions, demands and expectations, they become demoralised and experience burnout (Martin 2015:iv). The way teachers think about the policy can inform their production and determination.

The findings of this study confirm that, indeed, teachers are not given an opportunity to raise their concerns by the stakeholders concerned. Also, teachers are treated unfairly because they are expected to implement the progression policy effectively even though they were not trained to implement the policy. It means teachers were not capacitated and developed enough to implement the policy, yet they are expected to account for learners' failure. Teachers are also confronted by numerous challenges that impede their teaching, while the education department only wants to lower dropout rates by pushing the learners through the school system by progressing them. The teachers in this study expressed serious concerns about learners who were consistently being progressed even though they possessed information gaps – this too, teachers perceived as an unfair act to the learners, because learners face unpleasant effects as a result of being progressed in accordance with the progression policy. From the findings, it was discovered that teachers too have been unfair to the learners by not offering progressed learners the support they need to cope in the preceding grades. SMTs do not adequately monitor the implementation of the policy, and this disadvantages learners, because SMTs do not ascertain that teachers do what is expected of them in order to yield positive results.

The findings also revealed that parents, as stakeholders, were unfair to teachers and learners. It seemed that parents' participation and interest in learners' education had declined

significantly. It had become difficult for teachers, on their own, to support learners, while parents, as stakeholders, did not play their part in providing their children with the necessary support. It was also gathered that teachers are not allowed participation in the policy, even though the policy affected them. Participation is an indication of a socially just workplace. People need to engage satisfactorily in all decisions that govern their lives. Social justice in education envisions an education system in which all stakeholders are able to develop to their full capacities without being treated unfairly by another stakeholder. Social justice is achieved in an organisation when individuals or groups are allowed to actively participate in decision-making and have their voices heard (Fraser 2008, in Pearson and Reddy 2021:6). The need for social justice theory, in this study, was to understand all the factors that play a role in the achievement of a socially just education system, with the aim of achieving all the stakeholders' equality and fairness at schools as social places.

4.12 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter provided a comprehensive report on the findings that emerged from the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions with teachers and departmental heads, and document analysis. As affirmed in the introductory paragraph, the objectives were to illustrate the empirical findings and to analyse the collected data, which had been organised into fundamental themes and subthemes that emanated from the four research sub-questions. The initial theme was training, and this theme assisted in finding out whether teachers were capacitated to implement the policy effectively. Findings reveal that most teachers were not prepared, therefore, they faces challenges and experiences the effects of the policy. The second theme addressed mainly the first research sub-question on the implementation challenges experienced by teachers. The general conclusion was that teachers experiences many challenges, with some originating from learners, and others from parents and the education system. The progression policy comes into conflict with individual liberties and it marginalises teachers.

The following theme dealt with protocols to deal with challenges that teachers may find impossible to solve. The fourth theme addressed the strategies that teachers use in assisting progressed learners. It was discovered that most teachers use the one-size-fits-all approach, while others remediate learners. The aim of the study, which was to explore the perceptions of teachers on the policy, was fulfilled through this theme. Teachers indicated the effects of

the policy and generally expressed negative views, including that the policy leads to a decline in the education standard, instead of achieving its initial target, which is to reduce the dropout rate. The final theme and documents were employed to answer the last research sub-question, which relates to the stipulations of the policy in South African schools and the role of teachers and schools. It was determined that the policy stipulates that teachers must devise appropriate strategies to assist and assess progressed learners, but teachers fail to do so. Monitoring on the part of SMTs and DBE is only done at the end of the year.

The summary of findings was presented in the form of themes. This is apparent in the systematic approach used to analyse qualitative data and do document analysis (Bowen 2009). A content analysis approach was used to inductively combine details from transcribed data. The presentation and analysis of data in this chapter pervade the last chapter of this study, which provides a summary, recommendations and the conclusion of the research study. The findings of the study were linked to the theoretical framework to confirm the relevance of social justice in the study.

CHAPTER 5:
SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION
OF THE STUDY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter, an analysis and interpretation of the data that were collected during semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis were presented. The analysis was based on conceptual support for the qualitative research method, which responded to the research problem. The chapter discussed themes and sub-themes derived by data analysis. In this chapter, the researcher will present the summary, dispense recommendations constructed from scrutinising related literature and the data collected with the data collection tools listed above. The chapter comprises three sections. The first section shares the implications of the findings, the second furnishes recommendations and the last concludes the study.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The initial chapter offered an introduction and background to the study, the research problem, and aims and objectives the study wanted to attain. These features vividly indicated the importance of this study, which aimed to address the problems related to the perceptions of teachers towards the implementation of the progression policy in primary schools. The main research question and research sub-questions were mapped out, with the objective of generating data to shed light on the problem being explored. It was in this chapter that the methodology and research designs were briefly explained, though they were thoroughly expounded in Chapter 3. The ethical considerations of the study were disclosed and the layout of the research study provided.

The second chapter covered the literature review as well as the theoretical framework of the study. Literature was revisited in order to link the current study with related studies, as well as to identify the gap that is not filled by previous studies. The details that were discussed in the literature review led to the development of an appropriate theoretical framework that guided the study.

Chapter 3 outlined the research design and methodology. The rationale for using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis for this study was provided. The population and sample, together with the sampling criteria, were explained. The procedures followed in analysing data were clarified. The ethical considerations to ensure trustworthiness and validity of the study were highlighted in this chapter.

Chapter 4 revealed the findings and interpretations of the study. In this chapter, the researcher made sense of the perceptions that teachers expressed in relation to this policy. Content analysis was used to analyse the gathered data; themes and sub themes were developed to break the data into manageable and comprehensive structures. The analysis of this data assisted the researcher to respond to the research questions and note similarities and differences in what teachers perceive of the policy.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of the study on the literature review were combined in the data presentation and interpretation chapter (Chapter 4). A summary of these findings will, therefore, be presented here in a manner that addresses the research sub-questions.

5.3.1 Challenges teachers face in the implementation of the policy

The main reason teachers experience challenges is a lack of training or development on how to cater for progressed learners. Most teachers indicated that the policy does not give clear guidelines for teaching and assessing progressed learners and, eventually, they have to account for learners' failures. Amongst other challenges, they indicated lack of parental involvement. Teachers, parents and learners have to work in unison to achieve quality education and thorough improvement of the educational performance of students.

Low literacy skills of learners also seemed to be an obstacle. Learners with these barriers appeared to be struggling with reading instructions on their own and giving responses through writing. In the midst of these struggles, they get lost and eventually lose interest in their studies. The problem is that low literacy levels may yield negative effects that could endure beyond the schooling years. Low literacy skills affect learners' social lives, because they cannot communicate effectively and clearly because they lack reading and writing skills.

Little or lack of parental involvement in learners' schooling becomes a barrier for effective teaching and learning. Parental involvement includes multiple activities that are aimed at improving teaching and learning, ensuring the success of a school and education fraternity, and the development of a child. These multiple activities can be carried in and out of the school setting. Teachers indicated that parents become less or not committed at all for various reasons. Some parents shy away because they themselves lack a proper educational background, some are careless, while some do not have sufficient time to become involved in their children's learning. Teachers do the best they can to invite and accommodate parents in the schooling process, but some parents do not cooperate, especially those of struggling learners. Teachers, parents and learners have to work in unison to achieve quality education and to improve the educational performance of students.

Learner numbers and time allocation are a challenge too. Teachers are swamped with large numbers of learners in their classes, and they cannot provide individual learner attention given the time allocated for one lesson, which is 30 minutes. In the 30 minutes, they need to teach and assess learners informally to check for attainment of lesson objectives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers had reservations regarding changes to timetable models. They reported that learners did not stick to their specific timetables, which resulted in repetition and missing content for some learners. Teachers disclosed that the time allocated for lessons was insufficient, because there were many learners who required special attention, yet their classes were overcrowded.

5.3.2 What strategies do teachers employ to assist in the implementation of the policy?

Concerning this question, the participants expressed that, in addition to applying a traditional one-size-fits-all approach, they remediated learners. Teachers do not consider the fact that learners vary according to intelligence and abilities, so they encounter challenges such as disinterest in learners. A significant number of teachers indicated that remediating learners required of them endless paperwork, a great deal of preparation and extended working hours. It was established that some teachers required incentives if they were to provide remedial time for progressed learners after working hours.

Participants also indicated that, as a way of assisting progressed learners, referring them to special schools and forming SBST committees in schools is mandatory, as per the SIAS (DBE 2014) policy. The committee determines and coordinates the support needs of learners

in schools. These needs could be anything at school and home that would assist in addressing the learners' barriers to learning. Learners with barriers to learning are accommodated by the SBST committee through their initiatives and strategies, such as seeking counselling from a social worker, police intervention in the case of criminal activities and inviting priests in schools to give teachers and learners word of God.

5.3.3 How do teachers perceive implementation of the progression policy and its potential effects on student learning?

The third research sub-question presented the theme of teachers' perceptions of the policy and its effects. This was also the aim of the study, namely to explore the perceptions of teachers on the progression policy in primary schools. For a thorough analysis of the theme, it was fundamental to discuss it under these sub-themes: decrease in dropout rates, deteriorating education standards, behavioural problems, delays in curriculum coverage and additional workload, and loss of interest and motivation.

The study established that teachers were not impressed with the implications of the policy and the influence and effects it has on the teaching and learning of learners, and its long-term effects. They highlighted that the general standard of education is declining. The quality of the learners the education system has produced since the implementation of the policy is substandard. They discern the policy as producing incompetent learners for future workplaces, and prospective tertiary students that are likely to drop out. There is a backlog and information gaps in these learners, but they are progressed regardless.

Some participants indicated that the policy lowers the dropout rate. Learners do not drop out as a result of being retained numerous times. However, some participants stated that the policy increases the dropout rate, due to learners experiencing difficulties with comprehension of content in ensuing grades. They claimed that, when learners advanced with information gaps, they felt challenged in advancing grades and ultimately drop out.

In the opinion of the participants, behavioural problems seemed to be an effect of the policy. A great number of participants indicated that progressed learners were problematic and misbehaved at school and in classrooms. This behaviour could have various reasons: learners have given up on learning, they are diverting attention from their shortcomings, want control and power and seek to get the same attention successful learners do. Generally, their

discipline is a problem, especially considering that corporal punishment has been abolished in schools. Participants indicated that parents have a false perception that teachers alone have to discipline learners, especially at school.

Teachers in this study mentioned that having progressed learners in their classes caused unnecessary delays in curriculum coverage and their workload is often escalated. Also, they indicated that progressed learners suffer as a result of the pacesetter, because teachers sometimes have to move on to a new topic and leave behind progressed learners who have not yet grasped content. The participants were in agreement that, in the case of progressed learners, the policy resonates with quantity without quality. Also, teachers' workload has increased, because they have to create remediation time to assist progressed learners.

5.3.4 What are the stipulations and intent of the progression policy in South Africa, and what are the roles of teachers and schools in this regard?

Through the NPA and NPPPR, it was gathered that teachers are mandated to assist progressed learners to adjust to the demands of the grade they are in. This means teachers must establish teaching strategies that will address the diverse needs of all learners. The policy does not directly spell out what the strategies are, or how and when they must be applied. It is up to the teachers to use their own discretion regarding the suitability of such strategies. This is what participants found puzzling, because they were not oriented on the strategies and they revealed that was a hurdle to them, because preparing for progressed learners demands a lot of time and many administrative tasks. They also divulged that they have to keep up with the pacesetter to cover curriculum timeously, and accommodating progressed learners causes delays that they ultimately have to account for, so they rather opt for the one-size-fits-all approach that assists them to work speedily.

The documents outline that schools have to conduct formal and informal assessments, they must give feedback to learners, and record marks and file them for use. The policies also highlight that the forms of assessment must be satisfactory for the development level, competency and age of learners in a grade. Assessments must be designed in a way that ensures that a variety of skills are assessed. SMTs oversee that all these prescripts are abided with, from the beginning to the end of the year.

From the participants, it was discovered that SMTs do not monitor their implementation of the policy. Some departmental heads said that they checked teachers' files for lesson planning, how they catered for progressed learners and whether or not the SBST committee is compliant and effective. Departmental heads indicated that the specification for progressing learners is that a learner must be in a phase for a period not exceeding four years, and the learners must be in an appropriate age cohort with their classmates. They indicated that, at the end of the year, they checked for these prescripts before submitting schedules to the principal, who also has to submit to the district office. The district office monitored the marks schedules at the end of the year to check whether schools abided with the promotion and progression stipulations.

5.4 FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

What emerged from the literature review is that the promotion and progression policy is confronted by a variety of challenges in terms of its implementation, interpretation and understanding, and the influence it has on the teacher, the learner and the education system. The existing constraints include a policy–practice gap, its administrative burden, the workload for teachers, and inadequate training of teachers regarding structured teaching and remedial activities. The literature review mentioned many teaching strategies that few teachers apply.

The literature indicates that several Western countries are successful in the implementation of the policy, because they have strong remediation in place. In developing countries, policy implementation is still a problem due to several factors, such as infrastructure, shortages of resources, lack of training for teachers and inadequate remediation strategies. Teachers in South Africa require incentives if they are to provide remediation and see it through. It is only in Cameroon where successful execution is evidenced, because the majority of teachers feel they are competent to execute the policy, therefore, they act as such. Teachers in this country comply with the pedagogical and administrative prescripts of the policy. The SMT also follows and monitors implementation of the policy. Teachers in Cameroon have been adequately trained to implement the policy, hence the policy's successful implementation.

A number of challenges that teachers face were highlighted, and they correspond to those stated by participants during data collection. Most challenges emanated from the education system and are beyond teachers' control. During data collection, it was gathered that the

policy has lasting negative implications for learners – during and after schooling. Generally, the policy is perceived to lower the standard of education, because learners drop out as illiterates, it leads to a decline in Grade 12 results, to the extent where learners struggle to make informed career decisions, and their career maturity remains problematic.

It was discovered that, in South Africa, the policy is implemented in different ways because of variable interpretation by schools and teachers. Schools manipulate the pass rate by offering learners multiple examination opportunities and learners are promoted regardless. Progressed learners are also stigmatised by both teachers and learners, and carry the label throughout their schooling years. Teachers are unable to provide support for progressed learners. All these negative effects make attempts to successfully implement the progression policy futile.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The recommendations of this study are based wholly on the themes identified in Section 4.3. Based on the findings of the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis, the following recommendations for policy makers and the Department of Education are suggested for further study of the process of assessment, teaching and learning.

Teachers ought to be involved in the planning and design stages of every policy, especially policies that they are expected to fully or partially implement. Teachers rely on these policies to guide their work, they are the ones who are confronted by their challenges, and they feel the impact more than anyone else. Their needs also need to be catered for.

It would be fruitful for learners, teachers and the education system to group progressed learners in their own, separate classroom, so that learners with learning barriers learn with a differentiated curriculum and their own qualified special education teacher. Having learners with learning barriers in the same class as gifted learners seems to cause challenges for teachers who seem to be unable to cater for classes of learners with mixed abilities.

It is essential for the DBE to make amendments to the policies. In doing so, feedback must be elicited from teachers through unions on how the policies can be implemented best. The progression policy must be amended as per the teacher's grievances. The policies must prescribe direct teaching and assessment strategies, to be used for all kinds of learners'

barriers and their intervention strategies. Training for teachers is vital, so they can have insight and guidance on the implementation of the policy.

The DBE must consider having quarterly district road shows, where teachers can share successful strategies they use individually in their classrooms to cater for progressed learners.

SMTs must fully monitor teachers during the year to ensure that teachers use teaching and assessment strategies suitable for learners with barriers. They must also be trained on the monitoring and control approaches. Their monitoring tools and form must have a section that addresses learners who face barriers.

Parents as stakeholders need to be cautioned of their relevance and roles in supporting learners in their schooling. They can be informed through seminars or awareness programmes on their importance in the teaching and learning process.

5.6 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

To conclude the study, the main research question is replicated:

What are the perceptions of teachers towards the implementation of the progression policy in primary schools?

To respond to this question, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with teachers and departmental heads of foundation, intermediate and senior phases to explore their perceptions. The study's overriding conclusion is that teachers have negative attitudes towards the policy, and these attitudes influence their performance. Learners and parents have become conscious of the policy, resulting in a decrease in their motivation to strive to work hard.

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the main findings of the study. The findings were outlined and the findings regarding the research sub-questions were reported. Recommendations of the study were also given.

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APPENDIX A: APPLICATION FOR TITLE REGISTRATION



Postgraduate Office
Faculty of Education
Room 16
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Faculty of Education
University of the Free State
P.O. Box 339
Bloemfontein 9300
South Africa
T: +27(0)51 401 3651
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Duvenhage@ufs.ac.za

14 October 2020

APPLICATION FOR TITLE REGISTRATION

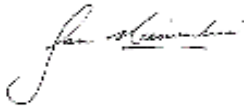
Applicant: Hlase, B
Student Number: 2014180380
Discipline: Education Law
Study Code: Masters (EDLW8900)

Dear Ms Hlase

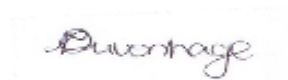
Your registered title is as follows: *"The perceptions of teachers on the implementation of the School Progression Policy in primary schools"*

All of the best with your studies.

Yours sincerely,



Prof Jan Nieuwenhuis
Chair: CTR committee



Ms. CS Duvenhage
Secretary: CTR committee

APPENDIX B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

13-Jun-2021

Dear Ms Boithatelo Hlisa

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

The Perceptions of Teachers Towards the Implementation of the School Progression Policy in Primary Schools

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2020/2100/21

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Adri Du Plessis

Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

205 Nelson Mandela
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Park West
Bloemfontein 9301
South Africa

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9337
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APPENDIX C: RESEARCH PERMISSION LETTER

Enquiries: M2 Thango
Ref: Research Permission: B. Hlaga
Tel. 082 537 2654
Email: M2.Thango@dsed.icebom.gov.za



35B Prinsloo Street
Patel 4
Ladybrand
9745

Dear Mr. B Hlaga


APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

This letter serves as an acknowledgement of receipt of your request to conduct research in the Free State Department of Education.

Topic: The perceptions of teachers towards the school progression policy in primary schools.

- 1. List of schools involved:** Ladybrand Public School, La Roux Primary School, Manyatseng Primary School and St. Benedict Intermediate School.
- 2. Target Population:** Four Foundation Phase Teachers, four Intermediate and Senior Phase Teachers and eight Departmental Heads of both the Foundation Phase, Intermediate and Senior Phases at the selected Primary Schools.
- 3. Period of research:** From the date of signature of this letter until 30 September 2021. Please note that the department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term (quarter) of the academic year. Should you fall behind your schedule by three months to complete your research project in the approved period, you will need to apply for an extension. The researcher is expected to request permission from the school principals to conduct research at schools.
- 4. The approval is subject to the following conditions:**
 - 4.1** The collection of data should not interfere with the normal tuition time or teaching process.
 - 4.2** A bound copy of the research document or a CD, should be submitted to the Free State Department of Education, Room 101, 1st Floor, Thuto House, St. Andrew Street, Bloemfontein.
 - 4.3** You will be expected, on completion of your research study to make a presentation to the relevant stakeholders in the Department.
 - 4.4** The ethics documents must be adhered to in the discourse of your study in our department.
- 5. Please note that costs relating to all the conditions mentioned above are your own responsibility.**

Yours sincerely


Mr. J.S. Tladi
Acting DDG: Corporate Services

26/02/2021
DATE:

RESEARCH APPLICATION BY B. HLAGA, PERMISSION LETTER 23 FEBRUARY 2021, MOTIELO DISTRICT
Strategy, Planning, Research & Policy Directorate Private Bag 910565, Bloemfontein, 9300 - Thuto House, Room 101, 1st Floor, St Andrew Street, Bloemfontein

APPENDIX D: PERMISSION SEEKING FROM PRINCIPALS

35 Prinsloo Street
Ladybrand
9745
Email address:
boithatelohlasa@gmail.com
21 June 2021

The Principal
X X X Primary School
Ladybrand
9745
Dear Sir/ Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

I Boithatelo Hlasa, student number 2014180380, kindly request permission to conduct research at your school. I am a student at University of the Free State and currently pursuing a Masters degree in Education Law. My research focuses on the perceptions of teachers towards the school progression policy in primary schools.

As part of my project, it is essential to acquire the necessary information from the school Departmental Heads (Foundation and Inter-Sen) and teachers in your school. I undertake to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of all participants and ensure that my investigations do not interrupt the smooth operations of the school. Data will be collected after school and once a week with each group of participants.

For any clarity and concerns regarding the study, kindly contact my supervisor:

Dr Ntombizandile Gcelu

072 377 3177

GceluN@ufs.ac.za

I hope my request will be considered

Yours truly

Boithatelo Hlasa

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

TITLE: *The perceptions of teachers towards the school progression policy in primary schools.*

You are kindly requested to participate in a research study conducted by Ms Boithatelo Hlasa from the University of Free State regarding your perceptions on the school progression policy. Please note that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time you wish. You will not be prejudiced in any manner or face a charge. Your identity will be kept private and information will not be relayed to any unauthorised person.

I _____ acknowledge that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the research study at any penalty or prejudice

I also understand that by signing below, I agree that this study has been explained to me in full, and I will take full responsibility to respond to any questions in the research project. I also accept that the findings of the research study may be used to intensify the quality of the project and my identity will be kept confidential. By signing this form, I pledge to participate in the study until the end.

Participant full name

date

Signature

Researcher

date

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEWS FOR TEACHERS

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS FOR TEACHERS

Title: The perceptions of teachers towards the implementation of the school progression policy in primary schools.

Dear Prospective participant

My name is Boithatelo Hlasa and I am pursuing a research project with the University of the Free State, studying towards a Master of Education degree (M.Ed) in Education Law. It is with great pleasure to inform you that you have been selected as a participant in this study. However, I wish to inform you that you have a right to decline to partake in the study. Should you wish to continue, I would like to assure you that you will remain anonymous and all data provided will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

1. Have you ever received training on the implementation of the policy, specifically with regard to teaching progressed learners?
2. Do you experience any challenges with the implementation of the policy?
3. How has the integration of progressed learners in the classroom affected your teaching?
4. Do you think the policy has effects or lasting implications on the learners?
5. Do you have enough resources to teach your subjects?
6. Do you have any teaching strategies in place to enhance the teaching and learning of progressed learners?
7. Do your assessment activities cater for progressed learners?
8. Are the assessment strategies useful in the classroom?
9. How is the implementation of the policy monitored?
10. What are your overall thoughts about the policy?

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEWS FOR DEPARTMENTAL HEADS

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS FOR DEPARTMENTAL HEADS

Title: The perceptions of teachers towards the implementation of the school progression policy in primary schools.

Dear Prospective participant

My name is Boithatelo Hlasa and I am pursuing a research project with the University of the Free State, studying towards a Master of Education degree (M.Ed) in Education Law. It is with great pleasure to inform you that you have been selected as a participant in this study. However, I wish to inform you that you have a right to decline to partake in the study. Should you wish to continue, I would like to assure you that you will remain anonymous and all data provided will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

1. Are all the teachers in possession of a copy of the progression policy?
2. Do the School Management Teams, Departmental Heads particularly, plan, conduct and do trainings for teachers regarding the implementation of the policy?
3. Do teachers and the school follow the stipulations of the policy?
4. Do you follow up on the implementation of the policy by the teachers?
5. What protocols do you have in place for dealing with challenges experienced by teachers?
6. Since the inception of the policy, how have the results been, did the policy improve or affect the overall performance?

What strategies do teachers employ in assisting the progressed learners?

APPENDIX H: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Title: The perceptions of teachers towards the implementation of the school progression policy in primary schools.

Dear Prospective participant

My name is Boithatelo Hlasa and I am pursuing a research project with the University of the Free State, studying towards a Master of Education degree (M.Ed) in Education Law. It is with great pleasure to inform you that you have been selected as a participant in this study. However, I wish to inform you that you have a right to decline to partake in the study. Should you wish to continue, I would like to assure you that you will remain anonymous and all data provided will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Should you feel intimidated in any manner or feel uncomfortable to provide some information during this discussion, feel free to let the researcher know.

1. What are the reasons for progressing learners besides compliance with the mandatory policy?
2. Are the parents of the progressed learners involved in assisting their children with school work?
3. Do parents have a say in the progression of their children and how do you deal with their demands?
4. What breakthroughs/challenges have you faced with the policy implementation and what are your opinions in this regard?
5. How does the School Management Team facilitate teaching and learning in both phases?
6. How often does monitoring of teachers occur?

7. What do you suggest can be done to improve the implementation of the policy?

APPENDIX I: LANGUAGE EDITOR'S LETTER

Declaration

22 December 2022

PO Box 4
Otjiwarongo
Namibia
+264 813359120
hettie.human@gmail.com

Master's thesis: The Perceptions of Teachers on the Implementation of the School Progression Policy in Primary Schools

Student: Boithatelo Hlasa

I confirm that I edited the thesis, checked the references and recommended changes to the text, which the student could accept or reject.



MA Language Practice



+264 813 359 120 | hettie.human@gmail.com

APPENDIX J: PLAGIARISM REPORT

Turnitin Originality Report

Processed on: 18-Jan-2023 18:14 SAST

ID: 1994815085

Word Count: 42615

Submitted: 1

Boithatelo Hlasa (2014180380) MEd Law dissertation.docx By Boithatelo Hlasa

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[George, Janet Lamont. "The difference between failure and success: barriers and facilitators impacting on academic performance of progressed learners within the FET Phase of a school in KwaZulu-Natal.", 2019](#)

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